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# The Everyday Life of a Woodland Nature Reserve: An Ethnographic Study

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

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Department of Sociology  
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# Declaration

I declare that this thesis is all my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Signed.....

Stephen James Birks

Date February 2018



## Abstract<sup>[L SEP]</sup>

This ethnographic study explores the ways in which a group of social actors participate in the everyday life of a woodland nature reserve, the relationships they establish with each other, the way they engage with the nonhuman materiality of the woodland and how they are affected by this engagement. An autoethnographic approach was taken which was based on the researcher's immersion in the research setting. This made possible a deep understanding of the affective experiences of the research participants and facilitated an appreciation of the meanings of the woodland materiality for informants which were often 'beyond words'.

The study focussed on a group of staff and volunteers and the everyday practical tasks that they engaged in which were mainly coppicing the reserve's ancient woodland and ecological surveying and monitoring of its woodland and wildlife. These activities are central to the everyday life of the reserve and take place in the context of the environment and wildlife conservation cultural fields. They are conceptualised as core activities and generate fulfilment for those who engage in them.

The analytical framework used brings together the concepts of habitus (Bourdieu, 1997), dwelling (Ingold, 1993), and 'becoming with' (Despret, 2004; Haraway, 2008) and allows an understanding of how informants' habitus (both general and specific) derived from the cultural fields they experienced during childhood and in employment, shape not only their participation in the everyday life of the reserve but also how this participation is experienced and their ways of being-in-the-woodland. These last are analysed as occupying a spectrum from an instrumental relationship, through becoming with and dwelling fleetingly to dwelling. Dwelling is associated with a woodland habitus.

One of my key findings is that involvement in the practices of wildlife conservation immerses social actors in a nonhuman woodland world that for most transforms their way of being-in-the-world.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

‘There are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot’

(Leopold 1966: ix)

This thesis is the outcome of a challenge I made to myself that regardless of my dyslexia I would undertake a university degree; thus began a thirteen-year process. I decided to take up the challenge and achieve my lifelong ambition of experiencing studying at university. Academic study came hard to me as my form of dyslexia, although not affecting my reading of words or comprehension of them, means that I have a problem with the patterns of letters in words. My memory does not retain these patterns from one day to the next or recognise their misuse or incorrect spelling. Producing written text even with the aid of modern word processing software is still problematic and a long drawn out process. However, from my first day at a local further education college I was instantly addicted to academic learning and discovery. This document is the result of embarking on a personal challenge to achieve what appeared to be impossible. In spite of this, the subject of my research so fascinated me during the journey that my struggle with the academic process slid into insignificance in comparison to the pleasure I gained from this academic study and research.

Carrying out this research was motivated by my personal circumstances as was the selection of my research topic. From early childhood I had a fascination with garden plants and this, as I entered teenage years, became a fascination with ‘nature’ in general. To be interested in nature as a child is not unusual, however, I grew up in an industrial area from which nature had been mostly banished both physically and culturally. To have an interest in nature was unusual in my childhood community. Whereas children in other social settings may have had access to the ‘wilds’ of the countryside my access to nature was limited. In consequence I turned to garden plants – a cultivated form of nature – accessible in a very limited way because Woolworths, a local general value store, stocked packets of seeds. Growing up in a domestic and educational

culture that showed little interest in nature, I had to pursue my interest in the natural world as best I could. I made my own way as a birdwatcher, and maintained an interest in nature by becoming a commercial horticulturalist, gardener and plant-lover. However, my engagement with the natural world in these contexts only partially provided me with the fulfilment that I had anticipated. I never quite engaged with the nonhuman world in the way in which I imagined would be possible, and which the media and literature portrayed as being possible. On reflection, I always thought that this was a personal failing because I did not have the patience or observational skills to be a good field naturalist, the academic training to be an ecologist or the vision and literary skills to be a nature writer.

Nevertheless, since childhood, I have been aware through television wildlife programmes, that some social actors and communities have relationships with the natural world that I could only dream of; and of course they usually lived in distant lands, led exotic lives herding reindeer, or lived the lives of hunter-gatherers that brought them into 'special' relationships with the natural world. Here was no solution to the problem that I felt existed with the way I engaged with the natural world. However, such things were not a central issue in my life, earning a living and raising children left little time for such esoteric concerns. When I began to study sociology thirteen years ago I found it hard to imagine that nature would be the object of a sociological research project that has engaged my attention for the last eight years. However it has and as I complete my thesis I feel that I have hardly scratched the surface of what can be understood sociologically about how human and nonhuman lives intersect.

During the course of my research I discovered that in a wide range of disciplines human-nonhuman relationships and their ontological foundation were at the centre of academic debate and enquiry. It also transpired that there was a growing awareness that there were many 'interesting' human-nonhuman relationships to investigate, if only more adventurous, ontological and epistemological stances were taken. As my academic interest in this area of study developed, I began to consider the possibility of studying the human-nonhuman relationships that occur in the English countryside. This brought me

to the realisation that a woodland nature reserve that I had occasionally visited, as a 'world out there', was a place where human and nonhuman lives intersected *and* was potentially a site for exploring such relationships. Thus Horwood Nature Reserve, owned and managed by a County Wildlife Trust, became my research site. The intellectual challenge was to contribute to the understanding of the relationships between humans and woodland, and the part such relationships play in the lives of social actors who engage with woodland environments.

## The Research Setting

I first became aware of Horwood Nature Reserve when a family member moved to live only a few miles from the reserve and we visited the woodland to look at wildlife together; we were particularly interested in the butterflies and plants that are specific to its ancient woodland habitat. I became more familiar with the reserve during my MA research when I studied the role that volunteers played in wildlife conservation work. This is when I came to realise that the staff and volunteers were engaging with the woodland world in ways that had not been extensively studied, analysed and explained. Being ever ready for a challenge, and possibly being foolhardy, I convinced myself and my university department that I had the capabilities of conducting an ethnography that had sociological validity, and that the reserve's world was a suitable topic for a PhD study.

As a research site, Horwood's woodland has a long history of human involvement. It has been continuously wooded since southern England was re-colonised by flowering plants after the last ice age. It is thought that some tree species found in the reserve, such as the wild service tree, may have been present in the flora of the original postglacial 'wildwood' (Rackham, 2006). Archaeological evidence indicates that humans have been present in Horwood since Neolithic times. There is also extensive archaeological evidence of Roman occupation, and documented evidence of human occupation exists from the thirteenth century (the source of this information is not referenced as it would identify the research site).

Horwood's woodland is a rare survivor of the vast woodland that once covered much of England; it remains as one of the largest surviving blocks of ancient woodland in the West of England, and extends up to 700 acres (283 hectares). For most of its recorded history, the woodland has been used as an economic resource producing plant-based, commercially useful products such as timber, firewood, poles, wood bark for tanning, and charcoal. However, as the economic value of the woodland declined during the twentieth century it became primarily a resource for a large country estate that valued the land for the habitat it provided for fox hunting and pheasant shooting. The rich biodiversity of the woodland, however, was also of interest to the conservation movement both locally and nationally.

This situation continued until the 1960s when, during a period of increasing environmental social movement activism, new conservation organisations emerged in Britain and other Western societies (Allen, 1976; Sheail, 1976). These organisations were active in Britain in establishing nature reserves, and during this time sixty acres of Horwood were purchased by the County Wildlife Trust (hereafter the Trust) and designated as a nature reserve. Most of the woodland, however, remained with the estate until 1997 when a further 640 acres of Horwood were, by Government statute, designated as a nature reserve and ownership of the land was transferred to the Trust. (The source of this information is not referenced as it would identify the research site).

## Intellectual Context

My PhD study has been conducted on a part-time basis. By taking up ethnographic fieldwork as a 'hobby' I was able to experience the daily life of the reserve one day a week for four years. From the outset, the aim of my research has been to bring to the attention of those outside of the wildlife conservation and environmental cultural field the complex relationships between people and woodland that are found within a nature reserve, and, in particular, to highlight the contribution of the woodland's materiality to such a setting. This is a world where human and nonhuman 'lives' intersect and become entangled (see for example Haraway, 2008). These elements however, do not operate independently but coalesce into a complex entanglement of lives,

events, and encounters, which contribute to the meaning that involvement in the everyday life of the reserve has for those who participate in its mundane activities. I also have a more political aim, which is to add to the endeavour of those seeking to rebalance human power within the human-nonhuman relationship by providing evidence of a less anthropocentric way of being-in-woodland that some of the staff and volunteers demonstrate when they ‘mooch’, ‘amble’ and ‘potter’ in the woodland.

As I explored and experienced the everyday life of the reserve, I sought ways of sociologically explaining my informants’ behaviour and particularly their relationship with the woodland and wildlife of the reserve. I took up and discarded many interesting research methods, concepts and theories, before I resolved that ethnography and autoethnography together with Bourdieu’s (1977) concepts of habitus and cultural fields and Ingold’s (1993; 2000; 2011) dwelling perspective could provide a way of understanding the staff and volunteers’ social interactions with each other as well as with the woodland and wildlife of the reserve. Involvement in conservation practices of the woodland nature reserve engages social actors in a physical and affective relationship with a dynamic woodland environment that is meaningful, and on occasion amounts to a spiritual experience. Unpacking these experiences of being-in-woodland sheds light on what the materiality of the woodland means to the social actors involved.

With the focus of my study being on social actors’ engagement with woodland, wildlife and their conservation, I initially situated my research as a study of environmentalism (Allen, 1976; Carson, 1963; Clarke, 2004; Evans, 1996; Rootes, 2007; Sheail, 1987) – a social movement that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century (Byrne, 1997). This literature, although useful in contextualising the research, does not address the nature of the relationships between human and nonhuman actors, and their material environment. It subsequently became apparent that there is a substantial body of empirical and theoretical research that relates to social actors’ relationships with, if not woodland, the environments that they inhabit.

An alternative approach to my research topic is offered by the conceptual approaches developed by scholars of serious leisure (Davidson & Stebbins, 2011; Stebbins, 2007; 2014). These approaches have been used to investigate a wide range of activities where passion for the activity, rather than financial reward, is the motivation for involvement in activities that take place in outdoor environments. This approach is useful as it suggests that even the involvement of those who are employed, when they are sufficiently motivated by their passion for an activity, can be understood through the concept of serious leisure. In this literature there is recognition of the environment in which an activity takes place and, in the concept of nature challenging activities, there is a move to address the question of the environment as nature. However, I have found that these approaches inadequately problematise the concepts of the environment and nature (see Davidson & Stebbins, 2011). Some scholars of serious leisure and related activities recognise this omission and investigate social actors' relationship with the environment and nature by examining its affective and spiritual dimensions (Humberstone, 2011; Nettleton, 2013). These authors' studies often engage with concepts that have emerged from sensory sociology as a way of examining the role of the material world in affective and spiritual experiences. They do this by recognising the embodiment of tacit skills and knowledge, which is an essential part of physical engagement with the material world (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2010; Curtin, 2010; Evers, 2009; Hockey, 2006; Malaflouris, 2008; Merchant, 2011; O'Connor, 2007; Straughan, 2012). Focusing on embodiment, not only of the skills and knowledge involved in an activity but also of the material environment, enables serious leisure and sensory sociology to conceptualise the role of the environment and nature in a different way, and contributes to the argument that the environment and nature are more than just a backdrop to social activity (for example see Humberstone, 2011; Nettleton, 2013). Thus, serious leisure and sensory sociology scholars help to explore both the physical and affective dimensions of social actors' relationships with the material world, and I draw on their work in my thesis.

In order to explore the relationship between the woodland environment and the reserve's social actors the following questions are addressed:

- What practices constitute the everyday life of the reserve?

- How is participation shaped by social actors' habitus?
- How do the social actors of the reserve engage with the nonhuman world?
- What does participation in the everyday activities of a nature reserve mean to the social actors involved?

The central claim of my thesis is that immersion in a woodland environment transforms social actors' ways of being-in-the-world. My findings show that some social actors engage with woodland as a world-out-there, whereas others see no distinction between themselves and their woodland environment. To some immersion offers a way of exploring and even transforming their way of being-in-the-world, whereas for others it is their way of being-in-the-world; this, following Ingold, I understand as 'dwelling'. However, most importantly, my findings show that some of those with an instrumental and therefore dualist approach to the world, through immersion in woodland, may temporarily or permanently experience the division between themselves and the world about them dissolving and find themselves becoming 'part of' the woodland. I have been able to make this claim by bringing together Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Ingold's of 'dwelling' and Haraway's of 'becoming with'. In so doing I use habitus, particularly the notions of general and specific habitus, to explain how some social actors' relationship with the woodland can be understood as a form of dwelling while others may dwell only fleetingly. I relate these differences to the general and specific habitus, particularly its instrumental disposition.

## Structure of the Thesis

My thesis consists of nine chapters. This introduction is the first chapter and is followed by a literature review, a methodology chapter, five analytical chapters and a conclusion.

In my literature review, I address the environmental, wildlife conservation and social movement literature to contextualise Horwood Nature Reserve within the environmental cultural field and the ecological paradigm that dominates it. I follow this literature with a discussion of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and



cultural field, Ingold's of 'dwelling' and Haraway's of 'becoming with'. I then explore the serious leisure literature and the approaches taken by these scholars towards issues of gender, the material environment and nature before moving to sensory sociology and its analysis of the senses and the embodiment of physically acquired tacit skills and knowledge. In the above areas of study, although the focus is often not specifically on social actors in their material environment, empirical research and its findings offer a substantial body of work upon which to base investigation of human relationships with the environment.

In Chapter Three, I describe the methodology I adopted and the research process. This offers an opportunity to reflect on ethnographic practice as a method, an art and a craft, and what such approaches can contribute to the research process. I also consider: my role as an insider and an outsider in relation to the research setting; the problem of going native; and the advantages of being an observing participant rather than a participant-observer in the process of gathering data and understanding a setting. I also consider the use of autoethnography, and the contribution analytical autoethnography, can make to resolving the validity issue in ethnographic research. Finally I provide a description of my informant sample in terms of class, age, gender, ethnicity and employment.

In the first of my analytical chapters, Chapter Four, I focus on the staff and volunteers' perspectives to establish the wildlife and landscape contexts in which the everyday life of the reserve unfolds, and the importance of the woodland and wildlife to the social actors involved. I discuss how the concepts of 'dwelling' and 'becoming with' can assist in unpicking a complex dance of encounters that occurs between the social actors and the nonhuman inhabitants of the reserve. These concepts are also helpful in drawing out the elements of the reserve's woodland and wildlife that are of the greatest significance to the staff and volunteers' experiences of being immersed in woodland.

In Chapter Five, the reader is introduced to the employees and volunteers who carry out the everyday practical management of Horwood Nature Reserve, their

social backgrounds and the activities they are involved in. Bourdieu's concept of habitus and more specifically the concept of stages of the habitus is used to explore the staff and volunteers' involvement in the everyday life of the reserve and their orientation toward different activities. From my analysis it emerges that the way my informants immersed themselves in the woodland, engaged with wildlife, and perceived the rewards of their experience was shaped by their general and specific habitus which were, in turn, shaped by the cultural fields they inhabited.

In Chapter Six the practice of coppicing is introduced to the reader and I explore how a group of predominantly middle-class men and women become immersed in the woodland's 'muddy' materiality. Their experience of being immersed in woodland materiality is examined, with a specific focus being placed on the embodiment of the tacit skills and knowledge involved in the use of hand tools for clearing the woodland and at the site of the bonfire where the brash (the waste) from coppicing is burned. The physical labour of coppicing is discussed in terms of class and gender with specific reference to the ways that tools are used. Coppicing is further discussed to show the variety of ways social actors engage with the woodland and its wildlife and the way that this engagement can be conceptualised as instrumental, 'becoming with' and 'dwelling'.

I focus on the task of surveying and monitoring in Chapter Seven with an emphasis on how the natural world is engaged with, either instrumentally or affectively. The analysis in this chapter is structured around the dichotomy of science and affect in relation to the material world, and how social actors engage with the natural world as naturalists or ecologists. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural fields are used to examine the way that these approaches to the material world are shaped by the cultural fields experienced by the social actors involved. Their experience of cultural fields is also used to understand why some of the younger and retired volunteers were critical of the reserve's wildlife conservation culture for being dominated by a dualist ecological scientific approach.

In Chapter Eight, ‘magical’ encounters involve social actors’ experience of the dissolving of the division between themselves and the woodland world. These experiences to which they attribute affective and spiritual connotations are explored and explained in terms of dwelling, ‘becoming with’, affect, fulfilment and flow. Encounters are shaped by habitus and can be understood in terms of existential capital. Conceptualising the affective and the spiritual dimensions of my informants’ magical experiences as moments of flow and fulfilment draws attention to how informants are rewarded with the experience of being transported to another world. However, understanding magical experiences in terms of immersion and dwelling was found to be more helpful, as the non-dualistic focus of dwelling fosters an openness to examining the affective and spiritual dimensions of magical experiences. This chapter also shows that informants’ ways of being-in-the-world were often inconsistent. They could be characterised as sometimes dwelling through immersion in the woodland when they were transformed by it, and came to move along with the woodland rather than acting on it; this gave rise to an experience of being part and parcel of the woodland.

In the concluding chapter I reflect on my research questions to draw out the threads that link my research process, the concepts I employed and my empirical findings. I begin by discussing practices that are central to the everyday life of the reserve that emerge from my ethnographic study and, in particular, I reflect on the contribution of the ethnographic process to identifying the practices that are important to the social actors involved. I then consider how participation is shaped by habitus, which can be further unpacked by thinking about habitus being constituted of recognisable stages, and how these stages assist us in our understanding of the way cultural fields are shaped by class, and also how cultural fields shape the habitus. I then deliberate on how understanding social actors’ engagement with the nonhuman woodland materiality is aided by the concepts of ‘becoming with’ and ‘dwelling’. Finally, I discuss how the research methods and the conceptual framework I employed contribute to understanding the instrumental, affective and spiritual meanings that the reserve’s woodland has for the staff and volunteers.

I conclude by commenting on the potential for developing further research into the entanglement of nonhuman woodland and wildlife environments with the lives of human social actors.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

The purpose of my case study of Horwood Nature Reserve is to make visible the culture of the reserve, and in particular, to explore the meaning that participation in the daily life of the reserve has for the staff and volunteers. In this chapter I position my study in the relevant sociological literature. I begin with a discussion of the cultural field of wildlife conservation before moving to consider the concepts that will guide my analysis; this includes a review of scholarly approaches to theorising and conceptualising being-in-the-world. I then review the conceptual and empirical approaches taken in the serious leisure literature; paying particular attention to the way it approaches embodiment, the senses and ‘nature’.

#### The Cultural Field of Environmentalism and Wildlife Conservation

I use the concept of cultural fields to frame my analysis of the environmental literature. Bourdieu proposes that practice occurs in the context of cultural fields that are the outcome of the interplay between multiple structures – including institutions, discourses, rules, regulations – and various forms of capital in which hierarchies of power are negotiated (Webb *et al.*, 2002). In this section, I explore the literature that relates to the cultural field of environmental and wildlife conservation in order to establish the macro-level context in which the micro-level activities of the everyday life of the reserve occur.

Wildlife conservation is an activity in which individuals, organisations and movements engage to preserve and protect indigenous plants and animals and their habitats by prioritising the needs of wildlife and wildlife habitats over human needs. In the past these activities were conducted in the context of refuges, reserves and sanctuaries where the objective was to keep habitats as they were by preventing outside interference (Nicholson, 1987). In its modern sense Evans (1996) considers wildlife conservation to be a broad concept that has moved beyond this limited definition and now, in addition to providing for

the needs of wildlife, must also take into consideration the aesthetic, scientific, economic and political interests of conservation activists and the population at large. Although wildlife conservation activists, organisations and movements have become more responsive to the expectations of people, their overriding priority remains the well-being of wildlife and wildlife habitats. Prioritising the needs of wildlife over that of human society is seen by Kheel (2008) and Plumwood (2002) as significant to the understanding of this social-natural world relationship, as it appears to question the tendency of human beings to regard themselves as the central and most significant entities in the social-natural world relationship.

### Wildlife Conservation in Britain

Wildlife conservation movements began to emerge in mid-Victorian Britain with campaigns to protect wildlife and the countryside from the destructive consequences of industrialisation, rapid population growth, and the introduction of new technologies that facilitated the wholesale slaughter of wildlife, and seabirds in particular (Allen, 1976; Doughty, 1975). These movements also challenged the established ethical and moral attitudes of scientists and naturalists who, at this time, often saw wildlife as a source of physical specimens for their collections. Many of those naturalists further demonstrated their attitudes by their enthusiasm and support for field-sports. This common disregard for the well-being of wildlife was also demonstrated by the large-scale killing of seabirds on their nests for sport, or simply to harvest their wing feathers for use in the millinery trade (Allen, 1976).

The first modern legislation to protect inhabitants of the nonhuman world began with moves to prohibit bear and bull-baiting and cock-fighting, but this may be seen more as a concern for the moral well-being of the human spectators than for the welfare of the animals involved (Tester, 1991). The nineteenth century saw legislation introduced, the main concern of which was the welfare of farm and other working animals (DeGrazia, 2002). Legislation was first extended to protect non-domestic animals with the introduction of The Gull Protection Act of 1837, a concern which continued into the twentieth century to achieve considerable, extended protection to a wider spectrum of wildlife and wildlife

habitats (Rootes, 2007).

Sociological investigations of environmental and conservation movements are persistent topics of the international environmental literature, but such analysis is only occasionally extended to British wildlife conservation movements (see Rootes, 2007). This contrasts with the attention paid to the historical development of wildlife protection and conservation movements in Britain, a topic that is well-documented by Doughty's (1975) and Moore-Colyer's (2000) histories of the campaigns that opposed the wearing of fur and feathers as fashion accessories, and also in the histories of conservation organisations produced by Clarke (2004), Evans (1996), Sheail (1976), and Smith (2007). These histories record the ebb and flow of the membership of conservation organisations and their evolving campaigns for wildlife conservation. They, however, make only tentative references to the relationships these organisations had to the wider political, economic and cultural context of wildlife conservation. For example, the early history of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is contemporaneous with first-wave feminism, the women's suffrage movement and the temperance movement. The occurrence of conservation movements has often paralleled the development of other social movements and appears to have followed a similar trajectory to first and second wave feminism. Both feminist and conservation movements saw considerable activity in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a decline in activity between the two World Wars and a rapid revival of interest and activity after the Second World War (Clarke, 2004; Rootes, 2007). Unfortunately, the central role that women played in founding these early conservation movements, although often noted, has not been critically analysed and their influence on the ethos and behaviour of conservation organisations and movements has only occasionally been explored (Ritvo, 1987).

Kheel's (2008) ecofeminist analysis of wildlife conservation highlights the gendered nature of current North American conservation practices. These practices stem from the philosophies of early conservationists such as, Roosevelt, Leopold, Rolston and Fox, who Kheel considers were deeply embedded in American frontier masculine identity, an identity that continues to

influence conservation practices today; that is, practices that are, because of their 'masculine' foundations, primarily concerned with hierarchically prioritising one nonhuman species over another, and the human over the nonhuman world. Kheel's analysis offers valuable insights into the gendered nature of conservation practices, the role of 'masculinity' in their evolution, and the need for researchers to be aware of gender and other social factors of class, age, education and ethnicity in the analysis of modern wildlife conservation.

An alternative view of the way that environmental literature contextualises the natural world is taken by Van Koppen (2000 p.301 italics in the original) who states:

The concept of nature that is predominant in most strands of environmental sociology is the concept of *nature as a resource*. This implies that nature is primarily conceived as a means of production, a good for consumption, and a pre-condition for human health.

He also argues that this leads to an expectation that 'nature' – the natural world 'accords with the *natural sciences*' (ibid. italics in the original). Dunlap (1993) is critical of the capitalist resource concept of the natural world that regards the environment as a supply depot, a human habitat and a repository for its waste. Conceptualising the natural world in this way neglects the appreciation and valuation of "nature" and wildlife for its aesthetic, spiritual, and intrinsic value and may also lead to the neglect of the way these feelings are experienced, often through physical and emotional engagement with the natural world. Neglecting these dimensions of relationships with wildlife and the natural world therefore, substantially limits the sense that can be made of the relationship that individuals have with wildlife and wildlife conservation. In Worster's (1994) view, 'non-resource' forms of engagement with wildlife involve the discovery of non-intrinsic values and not simply the instrumental exploitation of nature.

Worster's (1994) proposals can best be understood through the ways that Arcadian concepts of nature are valued, and the ways that these values are expressed in ideas and ideals of Romanticism, the rural idyll and the purity of wildness. Romanticism involves enjoyment and appreciation of the beauty of nature and landscape, the rural idyll that refers to a lost golden age that may



potentially be recreated, and the purity of wildness is valued for its separation from human activity. The tendency of environmental research to concentrate on nature as a resource, and the neglect of Arcadian concepts of nature detracts from an effective critical analysis of wildlife conservation and renders invisible the way that those involved in wildlife conservation value and experience wildlife as both a material and an aesthetic resource.

Both Van Koppen (2000) and Franklin (2002) consider that sociologists have neglected wildlife conservation because environmentalism conflates nature with the environment, which may have drawn attention away from wildlife conservation movements as distinct entities within environmentalism. Byrne provides an alternative explanation for the low profile of wildlife conservation in the sociological literature, when he compares Greenpeace with The Wildlife Trusts. The former he considers to be overtly political and radical, whereas the Wildlife Trusts are rarely controversial and, as Byrne (1997 p.129) considers are 'reformist rather than radical or revolutionary . . . seek[ing] only to achieve certain specific aims within the overall confines of the existing socioeconomic system'. This recognition of the reformist, non-radical character of leading wildlife conservation organisations is a valuable insight into understanding the absence of a sociological analysis of British wildlife conservation movements in the literature.

Thus far I have reviewed the environmental literature to situate my research topic in relation to British environmental paradigms. These paradigms I characterised as constituting a cultural field. Reviewing the literature from this perspective has enabled me to situate the research in relation to the environmental cultural field, its discourses, concepts, attitudes, values and hierarchies of power. It has also established that within the environmental cultural field the natural world is viewed as both a 'resource' that is primarily valued in economic terms and as one that is worthy of protection. Conceptualising the natural world as both a resource for economic exploitation and as something to be conserved is valuable in terms of understanding the evolution of wildlife conservation and conservation organisations, but it does not present a conceptualisation of the natural world that aids our understanding

of the meaning that involvement in practical conservation activities has for the social actors involved. In particular it does not fully address how social actors conceptually and empirically engage with 'nature' in the process of being-in-the-world. I will further discuss being-in-the-world after positioning my thesis in relation to Bourdieu's theory of practice.

## Using Bourdieu

From my early encounters with the social actors of the reserve two things emerged: firstly, it was apparent that participating practically in the everyday life of the reserve contributed creatively to their lives and, secondly, the question then arose of how this could be understood and explained. The solution to this question appeared to me to be offered in the work of Bourdieu but the first challenge was to grapple with his writing style. Reed-Danahay (2005 p.9) suggests Bourdieu's style is 'often difficult'. By persevering with Bourdieu's complex language and referring to the secondary literature that addresses his work, I came to agree with Jenkins (1992) and Reed-Danahay (2005) that Bourdieu is 'good to think with'. This Jenkins (1992 p.10) attributes to his:

Occupying . . . a political and theoretical space constructed out of the divergent currents of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, structuralism and interactionism, pessimistic determinism and a celebratory belief in the improvisatory creative potential of human practice,

Exploring the literature that developed from Bourdieu's (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice* I single out two central tenets of his work, habitus and cultural field, and in what follows consider how my research relates to these concepts and what they contribute to my analysis.

## Habitus

Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been found to be a useful analytical tool in empirical studies in a wide range of social settings: boxing (Wacquant, 2004), forest fire fighting (Desmond, 2007), ballet (Wainwright *et al.*, 2005) and nursing (Rhynas, 2005). Although habitus is used extensively, as Sallaz and Zavisca (2007 pp.24-25) recognise, it is a slippery concept; none the less they identify its fundamental characteristics as being:

First . . . a disposition, habitus is less a set of conscious strategies and

preferences than an embodied sense of the world. . . . Second . . . it is internalized in individuals through early socialization in the family or primary group, habitus is durable (although never immutable). Third, habitus is transposable, in that people carry their dispositions with them as they enter new settings.

These three characteristics of habitus offer a framework for understanding my informants' involvement in the everyday life of the reserve. They are helpful as, in combination, they address issues of bodily engagement, socialisation and the transfer of dispositions between fields.

Earlier in this Chapter when contextualising the environmental field, I noted that wildlife conservation tended to be reformist rather than radical or revolutionary, this is also a prevalent characteristic of the everyday life of the reserve and provides a parallel with Bourdieu's concept of habitus. For although he argues against criticisms of habitus as being rigid and static by authors such as Jenkins (1992), Bourdieu (1977 p.161) accepts that revision of dispositions is never radical:

Habitus change constantly in response to new experiences. Dispositions are subject to a kind of permanent revision, but one which is never radical, because it works on the basis of the premises established in the previous state. They are characterized by a combination of constancy and variation which varies according to the individual and his [sic] degree of flexibility or rigidity.

In my research I found that the reserve provides a social environment, which is conducive to the revision of social actors dispositions as they move between the fields they have previously experienced and the cultural field of the reserve.

Desmond (2007 p.12 my italics) also summarises habitus in a way that highlights its relevance to my research. He proposes:

A habitus is the presence of social and organizational structures in individuals' bodies in the form of durable and generative dispositions that guide their thoughts and behaviors. As embodied history, as internalized and forgotten socialization, *one's habitus is the source of one's practical sense.*

The habitus as a source of practical sense is particularly relevant to understanding the everyday life of the reserve, as the reserve is a realm of the senses and practical action.

### Stages of Habitus

I use stages of habitus to provide me with a ‘grip’ on the relationship between fields, my informants’ life trajectories and their involvement in the everyday life of the reserve. Here I consider how Bourdieu (1977), Desmond, (2007), and Wacquant (2014a) conceptualise stages of the habitus. These authors have theorised stages in terms of a general (primary or generic) habitus and a specific (secondary) habitus and, in passing, Wacquant (2014a) also proposes the possibility of tertiary, quaternary, quinary, [sic] etc. stages of habitus. Conceptualising habitus in this way is particularly suited to my analysis as most of my informants are older volunteers and have experienced many cultural fields where there has been potential for development of the habitus. In the idea of general and specific habitus these authors recognise that the habitus evolves as social actors encounter and experience domestic, educational and employment fields and in the process acquire dispositions that are appropriate to engagement in such fields. The advantage of conceptualising stages is that it makes it possible to understand how habitus changes in relation to the cultural fields encountered, and in how social actors’ participation in them contributes to their evolution. Thinking of habitus as potentially having stages, and therefore being mutable, is useful to understanding the changes and continuity of habitus in my informants’ trajectories through life and the way they participate in the everyday life of the reserve.

Wacquant (2014a p.7) identifies the general habitus with dispositions that are acquired slowly and imperceptibly in early childhood through the family and he argues that these are the foundation of the specific habitus. The dispositions of the specific habitus are acquired, he proposes, at an accelerated pace when social actors encounter academic and/or employment fields. By scrutinising the life trajectories of my informants and the fields that they encounter during their progress through life I identify how the experience of such fields shapes their practical engagement with the reserve.

## Cultural Fields

Having referred to conservation as a cultural field I now move to further elaborate on the contribution that the study of cultural fields brings to research.

As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 p.107) remind us:

The notion of field reminds us that the true object of social science is not the individual, even though one cannot construct a field if not through individuals, since the information necessary for statistical analysis is generally attached to individuals or institutions. It is the field which is primary and must be the focus of the research operations.

Rhynas (2005 p.181 *italics in the original*), reinforces the view of Bourdieu and Wacquant, and offers a succinct explanation of the concept of field and its value to the social researcher:

The *field* provides the frame of analysis for the study of any aspect of social life. It can be described as a series of structures, institutions, authorities and activities, all of which relate to the people acting within the field. It is not a static entity, but changes as practices or power dynamics challenge the boundaries of the field. Every person acting within the field is capable of producing effects on it, and competition between people is important in determining the future direction of the field. The field, as described by Bourdieu, should be the primary area of study in any research project as it is relationships within the field that are important, rather than the individual actors.

In this section I have discussed how the concepts of habitus, stages of the habitus and cultural fields can contribute to an understanding of social agents' participation in the everyday life the reserve. Examining the relationship between habitus and cultural fields offers a pathway for understanding how social backgrounds have consequences for social actors' participation in the everyday practical activities of the reserve. In the following section I explore approaches that are offered as ways of understanding social actors' different ways of being-in-the-world.

## Being-in-the-World

One of these ways of being is provided by Fine (2003), who conceptualises the activity of searching for mushrooms, either as a curiosity or a source of food, as naturework; an idea he developed in order to rethink the way that '[s]ociologists, like most citizens, comfortably draw a bright and shining line between culture and nature, between human society and the wild' (Fine, 1997 p.68). From this perspective 'nature' can be seen as being treated as race and gender were in the past, as unproblematic biological categories and not as ideological and social constructs. Fine argues further that this problem extends to environmentalism as '[b]elief in the separate reality of nature is central to modern environmentalism' (Fine, 2003 p.6). He also notes that environmental sociology has taken an essentialist and positivist approach characterising nature as a social fact, whereas he sees it as a social construct in need of interpretation. To aid an interpretive analysis of the entanglements of humans with nature, Fine (2003) proposes a social actor perspective of nature as driven by social forces and suggests that human engagement with nature can be construed as conforming to three ideal types: humanist, protectionist and organic. According to these ideal types, nature is perceived as either: a resource to be used (sustainable development); as a special, authentic realm distinct from the built human world (nature's wildness is protected for human benefit), and finally as an organic realm where humanity is part of the organic whole and the dualistic distinction between nature and culture dissolve (all entities have a moral and ethical status).

Lemelin (2009 p.566) is critical of Fine's proposal that the underlying principal of naturework is that it 'provide[s] [a] consistent approach to all activities'. From his experience of studying human dragonfly hunters he found that Fine's ideal types of humanist, protectionist and organic human behaviour limited his analysis; the worldviews of his informants were more 'malleable and dynamic and subject to various social and ecological forces' (ibid.) than Fine's ideal types catered for. He therefore proposes that worldviews should be considered as blurred categories that grade into each other, and thereby more closely reflect the empirical world.

The distinction between the ontological dualist foundation of the humanist and protectionist ideal types, and the nondualism of the organic ideal type is the theme of the following section. The literature is examined to draw out how dualist and nondualist approaches shape interpretations of the way class, gender, sensory experience and understandings of ‘nature’ affect social actors’ experience of the world. To this end a dualist ontology is seen as leading to a characterisation of nature as backdrop and ‘other’, whereas a nondualist ontology underpins a phenomenological approach where individuals and things only exist as part of and in relation with the world; this is conceptualised as being-in-the-world.

Being-in-the-world is extensively addressed in the ‘nature writing’ of authors such as Carson (1952), Deakin (2007), Leopold (1966), Muir (1987), Thoreau (1995), and Wordsworth *et al.* (1991). Their writing stems from long-term immersion in or very close engagement (over lengthy periods of time) with the material world of landscapes, plants and animals. Their perspective of being immersed in the world challenges the view that there are two distinct worlds: the social and the natural. Examining the academic literature in which ‘nature’ features, the influence of the seminal works of these nature writers is evident (see for example Nettleton, 2013; 2015).

### Actor Network Theory

Latour from a science studies background found dualistic approaches problematic, and in response to his concerns developed Actor Network Theory. Actor Network Theory is most recognised for the way in which it has broadened the remit of social inquiry through its inclusivity, admitting any element of the living and non-living world into its analysis. Actor Network theorists insist that human and nonhuman actors should be described in the same terms, and this is referred to as the principle of ‘generalized symmetry’ (Latour, 1993 p.103) with both human and nonhuman actors conceptualised as actants. The networks of Actor Network Theory are shaped by the relationships between actants in an ongoing, fluid process. Differences between objects emerge from the network of relations and should not be assumed to be pre-existing. The inclusive approach

that Latour (1993; 1999; 2007) takes is also present in the earlier work of Whitehead (2004) who, in his effort to overcome the problem of, as he termed it, the ‘the bifurcation of nature’ (the separation of the social and natural world) viewed all enduring things as ‘societies’.

Scholars of Actor Network Theory have contributed substantially to reintroducing the nonhuman into social research. Their endeavours have, however, received criticism from others with a similar interest in the intersections of human and nonhuman lives. Cloke and Jones (2001 pp.649 *italics in the original*), for instance, make two important points about Actor Network Theory; that it ‘at one and the same time highlights the role of nonhuman agents *and* obscures their precise contribution to relational agency’. Along with these authors, I find a difficulty with Actor Network Theory in that it obscures the contribution of ‘actants’, and particularly the necessity of appreciating, as Cloke and Jones (2001 pp.649-650) note, ‘the creative, unique, capacities that differing nonhuman actants possess’. Ingold (2008b) also takes issue with the principle of symmetry and the concept of actants; he argues that there is a problem with a blanket category term of actant that encompasses grains of sand and humans. He states, ‘To attribute agency to objects that do not grow or develop that consequently embody no skill and whose movement is not therefore coupled to their perception, is ludicrous’ (ibid. p.215). I interpret Ingold’s argument that agency resides with ‘living’ creatures and that his understanding shares similarities with Cloke and Jones’s emphasis on the creative, unique, capacities of agents that are overshadowed by a preoccupation with what emanates from network connections.

Despite these criticisms, Actor Network Theory is a valuable approach as, by bringing into focus the role of the nonhuman into the being-in-the-world of social actors, it challenges the dominant dualistic paradigm.

## Dwelling

As I have already indicated, Ingold is critical of Actor Network Theory and has developed, instead, the concept of dwelling. Dwelling is a concept that reflects Ingold’s interests, which are wide ranging, and include environmental



perception, language, technology, skilled practice, art, architecture, and ecological approaches to anthropology. In his early anthropological work, he was concerned with northern indigenous peoples whose livelihood is reliant on their relationship with their caribou herds. He rejects the established (western) dualistic model of perceiving human relationships with the nonhuman from the perspective of mental cognitive processes in favour of considering relations with the world through embodied perception and the practising of embodied skills. His focus is on the interactivity of 'being at home in the world' (Ingold, 2005 p.503), that '*crosscuts* the boundary between [the] human and non-human' (ibid. p.504 italics in the original) and recognises 'the animal-in-its-environment rather than the self-contained individual' (Ingold, 2000 p.186). In the latter, can be seen the influence of Heidegger which Ingold (ibid. p.173) acknowledges.

To overcome the problem of dualism, encounters between what are often construed as the social and material worlds are conceptualised by Ingold (1993 p.163 italics in the original) as constituting a 'taskscape' that is:

populated with beings who are themselves agents, and who reciprocally 'act back' in the process of their own dwelling. In other words, the taskscape exists not just as activity but as *interactivity*.

This interactivity constitutes 'dwelling' a concept that Ingold (1993 p.155) summarises in the following way:

A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there – to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these, in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people's engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance.

Ingold has built on his initial concept of dwelling by introducing a number of additional concepts, such as taskscape and meshwork. He writes, 'Just as the landscape is an array of related features, so – by analogy – the taskscape is an array of related activities' (2000 p.195). The concept of meshwork draws us away from the view that relationships occur in a single plane of networks, to suggest that they take place in 'a *meshwork in fluid space*' (2008a p.1796 italics

in the original). These terms encapsulate Ingold's views that the human and nonhuman occupy one world and that human-nonhuman relationships are more fully understood if viewed from such a perspective.

Conceptualising being-in-the-world through the concept of dwelling Ingold leads us to understand is a two-way process involving the landscape and social actors. He writes, 'movement is embodied, on the side of the people, in their "muscular consciousness", and on the side of the landscape, in its network of paths and tracks' (Ingold, 1993 p.167). Dwelling is more than moving through the landscape, it is being a part of the trenches, tracks and paths through which social actors move, and these in turn, being a part of social actors' lives and bodies. Accepting this reciprocal relationship offers a route to a non-dualistic analytical potential for understanding different ways of being-in-the-world.

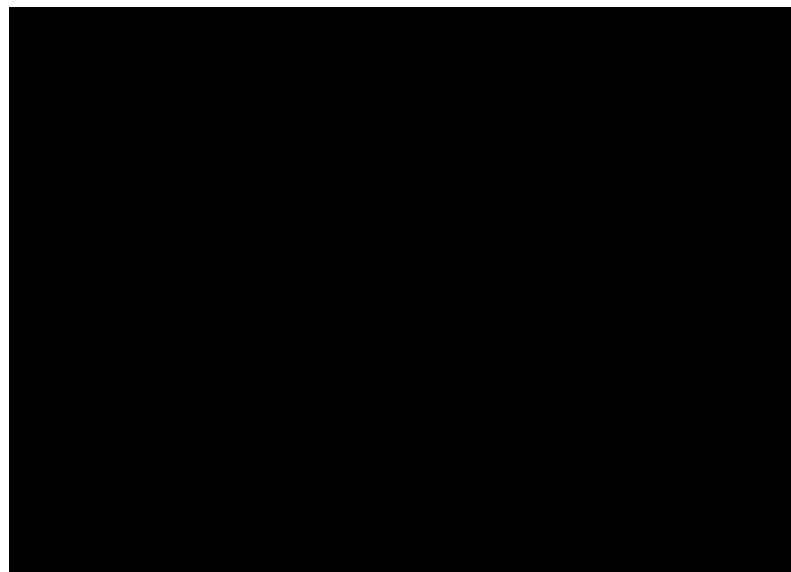


Figure 2.1: *The Harvesters* (1565) Pieter Bruegel the Elder  
(reproduced in Ingold 1993 p.165)

Ingold expands on how the landscape is dwelt in by using the painting *The Harvesters* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Ingold, 1993). In *The Harvesters* a tree is the central feature. Ingold draws us into the concept of dwelling through the growth of trees and their history in relation to human participation in the landscape. He explains:

In a sense, then, the tree bridges the gap between the apparently fixed and invariant forms of the landscape and the mobile and transient

forms of animal life, visible proof that all of these forms, from the most permanent to the most ephemeral, are dynamically linked under transformation within the movement of becoming of the world as a whole (ibid. p.168).

This quote of Ingold's draws attention to the role of flora in the process of transformation between the human and nonhuman and introduces a link with the work of Haraway by using the phrase, 'transformation within the movement of becoming' (ibid.). Haraway and Despret (from whom Haraway borrows the phrase) use the idea of 'becoming with' to conceptualise how, in relating to each other, embodied creatures affect and are changed by each other so that each takes on characteristics of the other (Despret, 2004; Haraway, 1991; 2008). There are many parallels between the work of Ingold, Despret and Haraway, such as their non-dualistic approach and the attention they pay to embodiment and bodily ways of being-in-the-world.

## Leisure: A Being-in-the-World Practice

Ingold's concept of dwelling has been taken up in the field of serious leisure by Nettleton who addresses the question of being-in-the-world through her concept of existential capital. To aid her analysis of social actors' relations with the 'landscape' she introduces Ingold's concepts of 'dwelling' and 'being alive'. Her aim is to explore how fell runners engage with the fells through the body in 'rooted and situated ways' (Nettleton, 2015 p.759). She describes how, as runners move, 'the ground is etched within their muscular consciousness. . . . they [the muscles] come to know, use and see the elements, the bog, stone, grass, [and] trods' (ibid. p.771). These experiences lead to an embodied relationship with and understanding of the fells that are hidden from view within a dualist ontology which conceptualises the Lakeland landscape as picturesque, something 'out there' rather than 'in here'. For Nettleton the fells 'infiltrate and interpenetrate the runners and movement through the fells generates a somatic aesthetic'. This 'pleasure in turn breeds *existential capital* an embodied gratification' (ibid. p.759 italics in the original) that arises from the embodied experience of running the fells.

Nettleton (2013 p.197) also draws on Bourdieu, but she moves beyond his

concept of cultural fields and its focus on divisions within them to address them as sites of shared ‘value and passion’. She is critical of Bourdieuan approaches because, while paying attention to ‘context and objective relations between social positions . . . what the body actually does, and how the body-subject is really lived within the field’ (ibid. p.199) is neglected. It is not only what the body does but also the form of the bodily experience that is important to her construction of the concept of existential capital. The corporeal and affective rather than the cognitive and rational are also brought to the foreground.

By engaging with the concepts of cultural fields and capital in the way she does, Nettleton is seeking to understand not, in Bourdieu’s terms, how ‘preferences for, and the profits of, sport are socially patterned’ (ibid. p.206), but what it is in fell running that is ‘inherent . . . in and of itself, that serves to precipitate shifts in the relations between different socio-economic and cultural groups’ (ibid. p.206). This something that is ‘inherent’ in fell running is conceptualised as existential capital, and is constituted by the bodily awareness derived from the experience of running on difficult mountainous terrain in adverse weather conditions in spectacular landscapes. The inherent aspect of fell running is so tied to the experience of fell running that it can only be fully understood by those that have experienced fell running. In her portrayal of fell running reference is made to what is experienced: decision-making, awareness, skills, knowledge, pain, fatigue, cold, exhaustion and how this leads to the experience becoming ‘utterly absorbing’ to the extent that ‘life’s troubles recede from view’ and the runner is transported ‘(literally and metaphorically) to another place’ (ibid. p.205). Here Nettleton is trying to capture and move beyond what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) captures as flow, and Stebbins (2007) as fulfilment.

Like fell running, participation in the everyday life of the reserve is a leisure activity; it is therefore important to locate my study in the leisure literature and explore how it addresses questions of class, gender, embodiment, “spirituality” and ‘nature’. These elements are central to the experience of participating in wildlife conservation, and to the way in which social actors’ interactions with nature are theorised, conceptualised and analysed, and also to our understanding of how people’s relationship with nature is experienced.

Locating wildlife conservation in the leisure literature is potentially problematic as participation involves both volunteers and employees. However, as this review progresses it will be demonstrated that the leisure literature addresses this hybrid nature of participation, and is a productive way of understanding both volunteers and employees participation in conservation activities.

Defining the topic of my study as a serious leisure activity (Stebbins, 2007) positions it in a literature that addresses the nature of volunteering. Low *et al.* (2007 p.10 italics in the original) define volunteering as: *'Any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment'*. For Stebbins (2007 p.9) volunteering is a leisure activity involving 'uncoerced help offered either formally or informally with no or, at most, token pay and done for the benefit of both other people (beyond the volunteer's family) and the volunteer'. The introduction of the terms 'formally and informally' and 'token pay' begins to demonstrate the wider relevance of leisure studies to the consideration of voluntary work in a nature reserve.

Social actors' engagement with 'nature' in nature reserves takes many forms: they may enter reserves to engage actively in environment and wildlife conservation, participate in specific nature-based activities such as watching wildlife, or simply experience being in the outdoors. They may also use the nature reserve as a place to engage in leisure activities, such as walking, running, wild swimming and cycling or walking with a dog, the latter being one of the most observable activities in many nature reserves. Involvement in the everyday life of a nature reserve is, for many social actors, a voluntary leisure activity but, even for the employees of organisations that manage nature reserves, their devotion to nature and the self-fulfilment they gain through their employment creates many parallels with the experiences of those participating in leisure pursuits (Stebbins, 2007; 2009; 2012; 2014).

The next section of this chapter explores the contribution of scholars who focus on the experiences of social actors participating in leisure activities in the

outdoor environment. Particular attention is paid to the way they conceptualise ‘nature’, and how they understand bodily engagement with the materiality of the environment within which leisure activities take place.

## Conceptualising Leisure

Changes that have occurred regarding the balance between work and leisure-time in the latter decades of the twentieth and early decades of the twenty-first century have stimulated academic interest in leisure, and raised awareness of the importance of leisure to social life. My first focus is on Stebbins’s idea of serious leisure and the theories, concepts and terminologies that are used to explore this concept. I consider first how Stebbins categorises leisure practices, and conceptualises social actors as having volunteering careers and/or being devotees of the core activities entailed. I consider how he develops his concept of serious leisure to explore social actors’ involvement in various leisure worlds. I then turn to Davidson and Stebbins’s (2011) concept of ‘nature challenging leisure activities’, which addresses activities in specific natural environments. Finally, I explore how the leisure literature approaches questions of class, gender, and embodiment, and the meaning that leisure activities have for the social actors involved.

A central premise of leisure research is that leisure provides social actors with opportunities to engage in rewarding activities that enable them to both ‘escape’ from everyday life and express themselves and their identity. For Stebbins (1982 p.251) leisure is a valuable social activity rather than simply ‘[a] happy, carefree refuge from our earnest pursuit of money and social standing’.

Stebbins identifies three forms of leisure activity: serious, casual and project-based leisure. Each of these has many subtypes. Casual leisure consists of short-lived activities such as watching TV, taking a nap or socialising with friends, in which participation requires only limited skills or training to participate. They are experiences that are ‘immediately, intrinsically rewarding, [and] relatively short-lived’ (Stebbins, 2007 p.38). Project-based leisure may also be short-lived and involves one off projects, such as planning a birthday party or organising a trip to the zoo, but these project-based leisure activities involve planning, effort,

skill and knowledge. Characteristics of both of these forms of activity may be present in serious leisure activities, but this third category is defined by its core activity not only being interesting and fulfilling but also requiring perseverance, effort, skills, knowledge, and experience in order to fulfil the task. For Stebbins (ibid. p.2):

Engaging in the core activity (and its component steps and actions) is a main feature that attracts participants to the leisure in question and encourages them to return for more. In short the core activity is a value in its own right.

Furthermore, Stebbins argues that engaging in serious leisure involves perseverance and effort on the part of the participant in the matters of gaining knowledge, training and acquiring skills, and that from these endeavours a leisure career may emerge similar to those that are experienced through work. In such circumstances, Stebbins (ibid p.11) proposes that social actors experience durable benefits such as:

self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction, belongingness and lasting physical products of the activity . . . and deep personal fulfilment.

He also identifies further elements of serious leisure in the way participants strongly engage with core activities and a ‘spirit of the community’ emerges (ibid. p.12). By identifying these constituent parts of serious leisure Stebbins prompts the question of how core activities contribute to personal fulfilment and community spirit.

### **Leisure’s Rewards: Fulfilment and Flow**

Fulfilment and the engendering of a spirit of community are durable benefits of participation in serious leisure activities (Stebbins, 2007). These are fostered by shared attitudes, practices, values, beliefs and goals when engaging with ‘like-minded’ others in materially productive core activities which involve a series of interrelated steps that participants find ‘enjoyable, [and] satisfying’ (Stebbins, 2010 p.23). To more fully understand these rewarding experiences Stebbins draws on Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990 p.4) concept of flow, defined as:

the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing

else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.

For Csikszentmihalyi (1990) the experience of 'flow' is contingent on what the task involves. It must be achievable, require concentration, have clear goals and have immediate rewards over which the actors involved have a sense of control. He proposes that when most, if not all, of these criteria are present the task results in distraction from the frustration and worries of everyday life. Social actors' sense of self is enriched and their sense of time is lost, and in this way 'flow, lifts the course of life to a different level . . . experience is intrinsically rewarding [and] life is justified in the present, instead of being held hostage to a hypothetical future gain' (ibid. p.69). The overriding characteristic of flow is that it constitutes 'an end in itself' (ibid. p.67). The sensation that comes with carrying out an intrinsically rewarding activity contributes to a social actor's psychological well-being. Flow therefore is a way of conceptualising involvement in leisure activities and the meaning of that involvement for participants. Thus, both Csikszentmihalyi and Stebbins suggest that involvement in core activities leads social actors to experience a sense of being that is so engrossing that they are distracted from the concerns of everyday life.

This idea of flow has been critiqued by Humberstone (2011 p.501) as she considers it limits how the thrill or 'peak' experience of swimmers, surfers and scuba divers can be understood. She considers that it masks and hides the:

affective, the embodied sensations, the sentience of the experience.

Questions that explore being and becoming, how the experience is mediated and realised and how this knowledge is embodied emotionally, spiritually and mindfully are largely neglected.

She also exposes the problems that arise from serious leisure scholars treating the ecological environment as something 'out there' to be challenged rather than something that is embodied emotionally and spiritually.

## Leisure and Nature

This idea of nature as something to be challenged and as external to social actors is also found in Davidson and Stebbins's (2011) concept of Nature Challenging Core Activities, which introduces the environment into the serious



leisure concept. They take a typological approach to defining core nature challenging activities, differentiating activities according to the six elements of nature: air, water, land, animals, plants and ice or snow. As an initial step in the investigation of leisure activities in the ‘natural’ environment, this is a useful organisational topology but envisioning the natural environment as a challenge or backdrop limits a fuller understanding of the role of the outdoors in leisure activities. Although Davidson and Stebbins usefully introduce the concept of ‘nature’ as an important element in the study of leisure, the concept is limited by its dualism and inability to conceptualise nature beyond these ideal type categories. This dualism is also a problem that Lemelin finds with other ideal type approaches to nature, such as Fine’s concept of Naturework discussed earlier. These approaches largely neglect both the part played by nature in ‘nature challenging activities’ and the various meanings that nature has for participants. For Davidson and Stebbins nature is taken as unproblematically ‘out there’, defined in opposition to society, culture and social actors, and they do not critically unpack it in the way Despret (2004) and Ingold (1986; 1993; 2000) do.

Despite these shortcomings, I use the typology of Davidson and Stebbins to organise my discussion of research into leisure activities, as it provides the opportunity to consider both the sociological questions asked in the leisure literature and how different conceptual approaches address the question of the way social and natural worlds are encountered, and engaged with during leisure activities.

## Outdoor Leisure

In this section I review literature that addresses core leisure activities in the outdoors. My discussion is framed by the question of how dualistic and nondualistic ontologies shape this literature, and how the entangled ‘mess’ of ‘nature’, class, gender, embodiment and sensory experience are investigated and analysed. I show that dualistic thinking is associated with treating nature as a ‘backdrop’, something that is ‘out there’, while nondualistic approaches explore ways of being-in-the-world associated with Ingold’s concepts of dwelling, and Despret’s (2004) and Haraway’s (1991; 2008) ‘becoming with’.

Before discussing the empirical studies it should be noted that in the leisure literature there are commonalities between studies in the way some issues are addressed. For example, class is generally not a focus of discussion and participants are unproblematically referred to as being privileged or white, western-working and middle-class; it is, however, middle-class participants who are the most likely to be involved in outdoor core activities (Dilley & Scraton, 2010). Many studies also characterise leisure as a means of ‘escape’ from everyday life, which is seen as a central feature of Stebbins’s (2007) concept of fulfilment, and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) concept of flow.

## Land

The literature contains a substantial body of work that relates to land-based core activities where social actors engage with the land through running, walking and climbing – thereby finding fulfilment. Walking in the British countryside is explored by Edensor (2000) as a way of escaping from everyday life, and as a reflexive embodied practice. This approach is similar to Nettleton’s in that it stresses the importance of embodied experience to the feeling of ‘being alive’ that involvement in these activities engenders.

Similarly Hockey (2006) in his autoethnography draws out the embodied nature of distance running and the body’s response to its training routes. He endeavours to portray the bodily experience of distance running by describing the physical proximity of other social actors, both runners and the general public, how runners ‘listen to, smell, see and feel their training routes’ (ibid p.187), and how these sensations become embodied in the ‘muscles, tendons, ligaments, skin and organs’ (ibid p.189) of the body. He further emphasises the role of sensation by citing Leder’s (1990 p.23) view that the ‘body is always a field of immediately lived sensation . . . Its presence is fleshed out by a ceaseless stream of kinesthesias, cutaneous and visceral sensations’ (ibid. p.189). In consequence, ‘the body, its very flesh, interacts with the fabric of the social world’ (ibid. p.198). He explains how runners make sense of their training place by ‘looking in active ways’ (ibid. p.196), and relates this to Ingold’s concepts of taskscape and dwelling, citing Ingold’s belief that

‘knowledge of the environment undergoes continuous formation in the very course of [our] moving about in it’ (Ingold 2000 p.226).

Atkinson (2010 p.1253) relies on the term scapelands to address the experience of ‘escape’. He cites Lyotard’s (1989) definition of scapelands as ‘a landscape whenever the mind is transported from one sensible matter to another, but retains the sensorial organisation appropriate to the first, or at least a memory of it’. He also introduces Foucault’s concept of crisis heterotopia, to explore how athletes seek environments for their physical activities that provide a means of escape through the embodied experience of these scapelands. These environments situate social actors in a ‘place of vastness, emptiness, uncertainty, physical risk and alienation’ that ‘generally involve one’s physical communion with the expansiveness of nature or . . . the vastness of the self’ (ibid. p.1253). Using the concepts of scapelands and crisis heterotopia to analyse the ‘escape’ from, and crossing of, the boundaries of everyday life, Atkinson adds to our understanding of the distancing from everyday life that occurs when social actors experience flow and fulfilment as portrayed in the serious leisure literature.

Whereas these studies take seriously the embodied and sensory nature of leisure activities, they rarely explore their gendering. An exception is Dilley and Scraton’s (2010 p.126) study of the social world of women and mothers in the climbing community. They use a ‘feminist prism’, a concept they attribute to Wearing (1998), to move their analysis beyond ‘any notion of gender as a variable by unsettling existing conceptualisations of serious leisure’. Their aim is to move beyond a focus on the individual and their core activity to draw into the conversation the wider social context of women’s climbing, the multiplicity of femininities and masculinities involved, and the gendered social structures that frame them. They take this stance in order to critique Stebbins’s definition of serious leisure, where ‘serious’ refers to ‘traditional masculine values of action, challenge and mastery, as opposed to the more traditionally feminine activities of creating meaningful interpersonal relationships and intimate spaces’ (ibid. pp.127-28). A significant finding from their study is that the men in these women’s lives were not experienced as a threat to continuing participation in

climbing, but they significantly affected how women engaged in climbing and, specifically, women's development of the skills of climbing and acquisition of independence and confidence through climbing. They further note that as women's climbing is about 'creating, and negotiating and/or resisting ideological expectations' (ibid. p.136) the influence of men affects how women can create the space in which to 'be' . . . "belong" and be different' (ibid.). The question of the physical environment of the core activity is not drawn out in this study; other than the indirect assumption that it provides a space in which the participants physically engage. Their conclusion is that climbing, similar to most outdoor leisure activities, takes place in a masculine taskscape, an idea that is taken up in studies of activities involving air.

### Air

Gender, escape and air are significant features of Anderson and Taylor's (2010) study of masculine skydiving and gun collecting subcultures. Their study focuses on masculine leisure subcultures and identity construction that occurs, (citing Hunt, 2008) in 'a vacuum separated from every-day life and experience' (ibid. p.37). Subcultures as spaces of "escape" are a recurring theme in their study. Like Nettleton, they find that it is difficult for those outside of the subculture to understand what it is that participants experience, and that they often misunderstand the rewards that flow from participation. The authors identify the masculine culture of skydiving and skydivers with themes that 'include speed, hedonism, coolness under pressure and risk taking' (ibid. p.54), which strongly contrasts with what Dilley and Scraton's (2010) found constructed the identities of women climbers. The authors in the study of skydivers understand air as an element of 'nature' and, like Davidson and Stebbins (2011), treat it as a backdrop to the activity.

### Water

Nature also tends to be seen as a backdrop in the literature that addresses gender, embodiment and sensory experience where 'nature' in the form of water is central to the activity. However, in the watery taskscapes of the scuba diver and surfer, discussion of water and waves is inescapable if the relationship between body and nature is to be understood.

In Throsby's (2016 p.79) analysis of marathon swimming, for instance, the watery context is not a focus of analysis although the subculture is defined as a 'stripped-down encounter between the individual and 'nature', outside of the softening trappings of modernity'. This once again reflects an understanding of nature both as presenting a challenge and as a 'vast place' in which to 'escape' (Atkinson, 2010); it is still an unproblematised, watery nature. Throsby, like Atkinson (2010), Hockey (2006) and Nettleton (2013), however, moves beyond a concern with how bodies act to a concern with how gendered bodies 'act and change in constant interaction' (Throsby, 2016 p.19). This is an approach that has parallels with Ingold's (1993) conceptualisation of the way landscape interactions modify both social actors' ways of being-in-the-world and the landscape.

Like Throsby (2016), Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2010), Merchant (2011) and Straughan (2012) understand scuba diving as an 'escape' from everyday life through immersion in water and the consequential changes in sensory experience. Merchant (2011 p.216) establishes the distinctiveness of this environment by citing Cater *et al.* (2003 p.37) and comments that 'if outer space is the "final frontier", it may be argued that the marine environment is the penultimate'. This environment, she suggests, leads to a reorganisation of a person's perception and interpretation from a land-based sensorium to a marine sensorium. A 'sensorium' is, in her terms, 'the sensuous and perceptual means by which we come to understand and dwell in space' (ibid. p.216). A pertinent point is that in unfamiliar, uncertain situations, environments and spaces – such as those experienced by scuba divers – 'bodily sensations and processes show themselves, or are 'lit up', most commonly and most notably in times of dysfunction,' (ibid. p.217), the term 'lit up' she takes from Leder (1990) who draws on Merleau-Ponty for the term.

In many studies of nature-challenging activities, the environment in which they take place is treated as a backdrop. In examining the experience of the scuba diver, however, the sensation of an alien aquatic environment is inescapable, and therefore becomes a central element prompting a novel phenomenological

approach to the analysis and understanding of bodily experience and its shaping by the environment. This approach shares with Ingold a recognition of the significance of the environment as more than a backdrop, and that being immersed in water, or running in the fells, involves more than becoming a scuba diver, marathon swimmer or fell runner as it entails ‘becoming-with’ (Despret, 2004; Haraway, 1991; 2008); a process of transforming and being transformed by the environment.

This is very evident in studies of surfing by academics interested in understanding the complexities of space, gender, spirituality, the elements and the embodiment of water based activities (Humberstone, 2011; Waitt, 2008). Humberstone, for instance, observes that there are a plethora of terms used to refer to such sports as surfing, snowboarding and windsurfing but that when nature and the environment are taken into account the activity is referred to as nature-based sports or sports in nature.

Evers (2009 p.898 italics in the original) in his exploration of the sensual life of Australian surfers explains the surfers’ experience and attempts to recognise the experience of ‘becoming with’ as follows:

Surfers ride *with* waves, not simply on them. They are part of our bodies and our bodies are part of them. It can reach the point where I do not know where I begin and the wave ends. I have a ‘body that surfs’. My perception negotiates an attunement with my own rhythms and the rhythms of the things themselves, their own tones, textures, and timing. The ecology penetrates any assemblage, and is not a backdrop.

Evers’s explanation of the surfer and the wave has similarities with Ingold’s concept of dwelling where to dwell is to be ‘part and parcel of the world’ (Ingold, 1993 p.164).

## Wildlife

In the remainder of this section I discuss literature that focuses on gardening, foraging and wildlife watching as these activities involve fauna, flora, and fungi, all of which are important to my research.

Gardening has been investigated to explore a diverse range of sociological topics: fulfilment in later life (Cheng & Pegg, 2016), the question of age and motivation (Ashton-Shaeffer & Constant, 2006) and community contribution to social capital and democratization (Glover *et al.*, 2005). Bhatti has explored the garden as a public and private space (Bhatti *et al.*, 2014), the contribution gardens make to homemaking (Bhatti & Church, 2000) and as a site relevant to 'contemporary environmental debates concerning human–nature relations at the everyday level' (Bhatti & Church, 2001 p.365). All these authors, although noting that 'the garden is also a space where individuals can develop complex, sensual and personalised readings of nature' (Bhatti & Church, 2001 p.380) discuss human-nature interactions from a dualist perspective.

In contrast Cammack *et al.* (2011) bring nature to the fore by introducing birds into the garden. In analysing the complex relationship that occurs between humans, gardens and birds the study raises questions about the extent to which gardens are viewed as sites for interactions with nature and areas of conservation action. They find that in order to understand the collaborative relationship between birds and humans it needs to be understood as being both subjective and experiential. In the following section, I focus on birds in the context of serious leisure and address how it illustrates the divide between the dualist and nondualist approaches.

A number of approaches are taken to the study of the core activity of birdwatching although the field is dependent primarily on research on North American birdwatchers. In their study, Scott and Lee (2010) use a recreational specialisation framework to explore birdwatchers' leisure careers. This framework 'is grounded in the idea that people have careers in their chosen activities, and that they progress to higher stages of involvement the longer they participate in the activity' (ibid. p.180). However although they report an increase in the abilities of birdwatchers to identify birds by sight and sound over time, and that this requires significant effort, that is the extent of their observation of how skills and knowledge are embodied. Gender is found to have little significance to how these skills are developed.

In contrast Lee *et al.* (2015 p.60) note that birdwatching is gendered. They found that men were list makers whereas women:

appear to be more emotionally attached to birding as an end in itself  
. . . they ascribed greater importance to birdwatching as a form of  
personal enrichment, enjoyment, satisfaction, and recreation.

Similarly, Moore *et al.* (2008) discovered that while the gender balance of men and women in American birdwatchers is equal, men become birdwatchers at an earlier age than women. Sali and Kuehn (2008), in their study of ‘home’ and ‘away-from-home’ birdwatchers in New York State, also explored the differences in the way men and women birdwatchers participated. They found that women were motivated by going outdoors and enjoying wildlife, whereas men were more motivated by the travel. Connell’s study of tourist birdwatchers adds an Australian and worldwide dimension to the birdwatching literature. He confirms that birdwatching tourists are predominantly middle-class, middle-aged, well-educated and affluent; this conforms with the class composition of most serious leisure activities.

My attention in the remainder of this section is still on plants, animals and fungi but as they are addressed by scholars of wildlife tourism. Encounters with wildlife are at the core of the wildlife tourist experience and understanding the role of wildlife in this experience is therefore vital. Curtin (2009 p.451) problematises memorable wildlife encounters explaining that what is experienced is “‘beyond words” . . . [when] participants are totally absorbed in the spectacle’. Curtin’s examining of such moments draws ‘nature’ closely into focus, and also draws attention to the difficulties of researching memorable wildlife experiences. She proposes a phenomenological approach, which emphasises the meaning of lived experience (see also Humberstone, 2011).

Curtin also shows that memorable wildlife moments can occur both at home and on holiday and are not dependent on the ‘exotic’ (Curtin, 2009). She explores how nonhuman charisma, the spontaneity of events, new species of fauna and flora, close proximity to, and large congregations of wildlife contribute to memorable wildlife encounters, and how participation in wildlife watching



enhances and reinforces ‘a sense of self’ amongst participants in the subcultures of both wildlife tourists and of Wildlife Trusts and bird clubs at home. Most of those who watch wildlife, whether as tourists or at home, are well-educated professionals and nature lovers.

As mentioned earlier, central to Stebbins’s concept of serious leisure is the experience of fulfilment. Curtin and Humberstone are also concerned with fulfilment and flow but for them the memorable moments that emerge from core activities have a spiritual dimension. Humberstone (2011 p.507), for instance, critiques the idea of flow as she considers that it masks the affective dimensions of ‘peak’ experience. She argues that:

whilst flow provides a description of the phenomenon where the consciousness becomes focused and intensified during physical activity and physiological changes can be observed, it is found wanting in furthering social analysis; the specific juncture of embodiment, senses, nature and practice-in-nature and this nexus . . . is better explored, I argue, through taking seriously the expression of spirituality.

Similarly Curtin (2005 p.12), accepts that wildlife tourists are seeking fulfilling experiences because modern ‘urbanisation and social constructs of nature have become emotionally and spiritually unfulfilling’. This points to the difficulty of accessing such experiences and suggests that Ingold’s (1986; 1993; 2000; 2005; 2007; 2011) conceptual approach can aid their exploration.

Memorable wildlife encounters are difficult to understand as social agents can often only describe them as being magical or beyond words. However, in more detailed stories of memorable wildlife encounters a more nuanced articulation of the emotional and spiritual experience surfaces. These emotional and spiritual experiences are a key to understanding what wildlife and more broadly what ‘nature’ means to those who engage in wildlife conservation practices.

In studies of subcultures of foraging and nature watching, a different approach is taken. Fine and Lemelin, for instance, focus on nature in the form of fungi and dragonflies. Lemelin (2007 p.143), when attempting to understand human–

dragonfly interactions, proposes that researchers should use methods that aid ‘multi-faceted interpretations of nature’ and, following Fine (2003), Lemelin argues that ‘all entities are worthy of a moral and ethical status based upon the function of their existence’ (Lemelin, 2009 p.558). Further he suggests that an organic perspective on nature ‘may represent some but not all Indigenous [sic] societies’ (ibid.) thereby reminding us that Ingold’s inspiration for his conceptual approach to being-in-the-world was inspired by his involvement with northern, indigenous, hunter-gatherers.

In this section, I have explored how participation in activities is addressed in the serious leisure literature and how ‘flow’ and fulfilment are central to the discussion. In particular I have considered whether the environment in which the activity takes place is understood as an active agent and found that, for the most part, attention is focused on the activity of becoming a birdwatcher, swimmer, runner, walker, surfer, or scuba diver and not on the embodied process of ‘becoming with’ land, air, water or wildlife. I have shown that those who take a non-dualistic, phenomenological approach attempt to capture the way body and elements become with each other, and how bodies are affected by as well as affecting the material world of which they are a part. This approach is also important when considering how bodily skills are acquired, something that is a crucial part of many of the leisure activities I have discussed.

## Embodying Skills and Knowledge

Researchers investigating craft skills such as pot throwing and glass blowing explore the way skills are acquired and embodied. O'Connor (2007 p.126), for instance, in her study of glass blowing, points out that, ‘[e]mbodiment characterizes our experience of the world. It is through embodied relations with the world, tacitly understood, that we accrue practical knowledge’ and the senses are a vital part of this. Potter (2008 p.446), however, draws our attention to the literature’s focus on the Western ‘classic five’ senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, arguing that this is at the cost of other sensory experiences such as feeling heat and pain. She argues, ‘the senses should be understood as an intermeshed web of perceptory apparatuses that direct the body’s total attention to its situation in the world’.

Malafleuris (2008 pp.19-20) explores this intermeshed web in his examination of the process of pot throwing, drawing out the problems associated with the study of the senses and the acquisition of tacit skills when words and conscious awareness are relied on.

As a great deal of cross-cultural ethnographic observation will testify, confronted with the ‘how do you do it?’ question, potters would prefer to ‘show you’ rather than simply ‘tell you’ their answer . . . Potters know more than what they can tell or explain and their hands often have reasons of which their mind is not aware and which the clay may resist or accommodate. Verbal description, however detailed, can hardly capture the phenomenological perturbations of real activity and the reciprocity between the crafted and the crafter.

O’Connor (2007 p.139) also found her mentor had problems in explaining the skills of glass blowing, ‘I now remember the hesitance that flitted across the face of my instructor, Rob, when I suggested that he demonstrate how to blow a goblet: “Anything but that,” he said’. Malafleuris and O’Connor’s recognition that the crafters of clay and glass know more than they can tell is important in considering how skills are embodied; as Malafleuris says the potter’s mind is unaware of what the hands – the body – ‘knows’ and the potter is therefore unable to explain what they do.

This underlines that the way skills become embodied is a tacit process and, as O’Connor (2007 p.126) says, ‘It is through embodied relations with the world, tacitly understood, that we accrue practical knowledge’. This tacit understanding is also addressed in studies of how the embodied skills of capoeira dancers, baristas and jazz pianists are acquired. In such phenomenological work, Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2010 pp. 331-332) suggest that the aim is to ‘capture . . . the “essences”, the core characteristics or structures of a phenomenon’. Of particular interest to them is the way phenomenologists focus on the “lived body” . . . that links mind, body, and world in an ongoing, fluid dynamic relationship’ (ibid. p.332). This is the body that they recognise in Heidegger’s conceptualisation of being-in-the-world and is ‘always already “in and of” the world’. Ingold also draws on this

conceptualisation in his discussion of being-in-the-world and dwelling, and it is also reflected in the following statement from Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 p.127):

social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted.

In the above we can see a common ontological theme: that the body is a part of and not separate from its world, and that it is through the senses that the body knows the world or, as Allen-Collinson and Hockey put it (citing Bull *et al.*, 2006), 'The senses mediate the relationship between self and society, mind and body, idea and object'. However, as they also point out, the student of the senses should be aware of the multitude of senses employed in engaging with the world, and that social actors become 'attuned' to their environment through their senses. Thus,

Terrain is more than mere ground, but also holds connotations of fitness for running purpose – its 'going': the condition underfoot and its effects upon progress, including properties of ground (the kind of rock, soil, temperature of the ground, hardness, evenness, and so on), and also what is growing or lying on it. (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2010 p.340).

Social actors also become attuned to the material they work with. Thus Malaflouris, in his exploration of the embodied skills, which constitute the potters' habitus, shows how the potter is attuned with the clay that they are moulding. In a similar way O'Connor (2007 p.132 italics in original) discusses the involvement of the senses in the apprentice's unconscious acquisition of a glass-blower's habitus, and how her body responds to and adapts when it 'catches' the heat of the furnace and glass:

[H]er adaptation is not wholly conscious; it happens at the level of the body . . . These adaptations are specifically in response to what she finds herself confronted with and, in this sense, lack an anticipatory quality. They do, however, in re-positioning the body, set up the opportunity for the restructuring of the novice's *habitus*.

In this way she considers how the novice glassblower engages with the field through the sensation of heat, as she responds to the ‘rules’ of the field by responding to the heat she develops a ‘feel for the game’ through a process of ‘bodily restructuration’.

In the literature discussed in this section, Heidegger’s conceptualisation that the body engaged in practice is a body that is already ‘in and of the world’ is foundational to our understanding of the way skills become embodied. Of particular note is that the embodied ‘abilities’ of the skilled runner, scuba diver and crafter of pots and glass are beyond words and are acquired through sensory, practical engagement in the activity. However, as this literature also shows, it is important to appreciate that there is more to the senses than the five Western senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch; as Humberstone suggests, there is a need to consider affect and spirituality in an exploration of sensory experiences.

## Conclusion

In the first section of this chapter, I reviewed the environment conservation literature and concluded that it contributes significantly to establishing the context in which the everyday life of the reserve is played out. It fails, however, to address the question of being-in-the-world without which it is not possible to fully explore the way that social actors engage with their environment. In the second section, my focus was on the concepts of habitus, cultural fields and dwelling, and the contribution they make to our understanding of embodied social relations and interactions. These concepts guide my analysis in the rest of this thesis. In the final section my focus was on how the material environment, embodiment and sensory experience have been addressed in the leisure literature. The material world, conceptualised as ‘nature’ or ‘the environment’, in other than the phenomenological and sensory literatures, mostly figures as a backdrop for the experience of fulfilment and flow. However, for scholars who took a phenomenological and nondualistic approach, the material world actively affects bodies and shapes social actors’ ways of being-in-the-world. Furthermore, their approach to understanding meaningful encounters, which are often beyond words, takes into account the contribution of affect, emotion and

spirituality.

In the next chapter, I describe the ethnographic methods I used to explore the everyday life of a nature reserve and, in the following chapters, I draw on the concepts explored here to understand the practical engagement of social actors with the wildlife and woodland of the reserve.

## Chapter Three

# Methodology

### Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the methodological approach regarding my research in Horwood Nature Reserve. It is a world where the lives of social actors intersect with the natural entanglements of the reserve's woodland as they 'care' for it. The focus of my study is on the practical activities of these social actors, and the relationships with the natural world that emerge from such involvement. At the outset, I assumed that the concerns of my study could be addressed by unpacking how social actors engaged with the reserve as wildlife conservationists. However, as my research progressed I came to understand that, although the fauna and flora and their well-being was a central reason for my informants' participation in the everyday life of the reserve, considering their involvement from this perspective was limiting as their participation was related to the much wider issue of their mode of being-in-the-world.

To frame my investigation of the everyday life of the reserve I explore the following questions:

- What practices constitute the everyday life of the reserve?
- How is participation shaped by social actors' habitus?
- How do the social actors of the reserve engage with the nonhuman world?
- What does participation in the everyday activities of a nature reserve mean to the social actors involved?

Concentrating on the issues of these questions situates my research in a substantial body of literature that addresses the main subjects of my study. There are many empirical studies of social actors engaging in the world, but investigations of settings where social and natural worlds intersect as they do in the reserve are rare. My study therefore has the opportunity of adding to the literature of how social actors practically explore being-in-the-world through engaging with woodland and wildlife entanglements.

The way in which I conducted my ethnographic study is set out below. I begin by explaining why I conducted ethnographic research before explaining how I engaged in participant observation, interviewed informants and introduced a questionnaire to gather data. I then introduce the methodological issues that emerged from my practical research experience.

## Why Ethnography?

In this section, I will explain why I have chosen to take an ethnographic approach to study the everyday life of a nature reserve. Defining ethnography is a contentious issue, but what I have taken from the debate is that the distinguishing features of ethnography are: the time the researcher spends in the field gathering data; the descriptive–analytical approach that is taken to the data; and the effective communicative literary style of its presentation (Desmond, 2007; Wacquant, 2004; Whyte, 1995).

Although my study is focused on the mundane practical activities of social actors in a nature reserve, my research is aimed at shedding light on a world where the natural and social closely intersect, and provide a social and material context that is conducive to social actors' modes of being-in-the-world. Inquiring into these complex social–natural world relationships in a way that gives equal weight to both social and natural contexts calls for an ethnographic approach, as this approach provides a way of engaging with the research setting that facilitates access to complex social and natural structures, and the relationships involved between them.

Ethnography has often been regarded as 'defining anthropology' and, as Wolcott (2008 p.11) acknowledges, in the early days of anthropology defining ethnography was relatively straightforward. He quotes Radcliffe-Brown's definition of ethnography as producing 'descriptive accounts of non-literate peoples'. Such a definition is inappropriate today, and no longer resembles the current face of ethnography apart from its reference to the value of ethnography for investigating the 'Other'. In the form of the fauna and flora of the reserve, the 'Other' is an important part of my study, as it constitutes the physical



context of the social world of the reserve. Atkinson *et al.* (1999) propose that the amount of time spent in the field by anthropologists is important and is reflected in the quality of the final monograph. Jeffrey and Troman (2004 p.535) also point to the foundation of ethnography in anthropology, and stress the importance of time in the field to ‘discern both the depth and complexity of social structures and relations’.

I chose ethnography as an appropriate research method to enquire into social meaning and practical involvement in the everyday life of the nature reserve, because as Brewer (2000 p.189) stresses, ethnography is a 'style of research that is distinguished by its objectives, which are to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given “field” or setting'.

Although often critical of ethnography, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995 p.1) consider involvement in the field to be useful, in that it provides data relevant to the topic under investigation.

In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.

They consider ethnography to be a valuable way of gathering data that is relevant to a particular research process, and although they define ethnography broadly as qualitative research, these authors also accept that quantitative methods can be a part of the ethnographic approach. Not limiting the range of methods available to the researcher is a major strength of ethnography, as this offers the flexibility to engage with any method that aids the research process. In this case, I take advantage of the flexibility of the ethnographic approach and introduce both autoethnography (see Anderson, 2006; Throsby, 2016) and multispecies ethnography (see Ogden *et al.*, 2013) to my study. However, as the anthropologists McCurdy *et al.*, (2005 p.9) note, it is important to remain conscious of the fact that amongst all of this diversity ethnography is also ‘a formal research approach.’ I find that being reminded of this aids me in contending with the vast complexity of my research setting, and remembering

that I am involved in producing a 'rational–scientific' study.

In introducing his approach to ethnography, and an exploration of the amorphous nature of ethnography, Wolcott (2008) states that 'ethnography is more than method: it is a way of conceptualizing as well as a way of looking'; and that essential features of ethnography are, 'holistic cross-cultural and comparative' (ibid. p.229) and 'based on first-hand experience, undertaken with explicit intent' (ibid.). Ethnography as a way of looking stands as a useful approach on which to model my research. That is, investigating a research setting where the social–natural world divide is a 'bridge' and the two worlds are holistically fused.

The approach I take to my research is to some extent a reflection of the evolution of ethnographic research, which at first focused on practical field research and only later developed an extensive methodological literature. Social scientists, Atkinson *et al.* (2003 p.7) state that early ethnographers' time was devoted to field research, publishing their results and little attention was paid to discussing their methods. 'devoted their time and energies to the conduct of practical field research and to publishing the results rather than writing extensively about their research methods.' They further highlight that anthropological fieldwork is seen 'In many quarters . . . as the extension of personal qualities – to be grounded in implicit principles rather than the application of explicit methodological precepts.' The contribution that the personal qualities and skills of the authors, of the previously mentioned monographs, contribute to their research sets them apart in the social research literature – this is demonstrated by their enduring presence.

I propose that the defining features, at the moment, of the ethnographic tradition are not the theories used, the methodology, or the methods employed, but the degree of skill, craft, or art that is applied to the research process.

## Ethnographic Fieldwork

In July 2008, after negotiating access with Ted, the manager of Horwood Nature Reserve, I began the fieldwork for my Sociology MA dissertation. After

completing this fieldwork, and being conscious that there was further scope for research in the reserve, I maintained contact with Ted and the volunteers. I continued to volunteer with the Thursday volunteers, and maintained contact with the County Wildlife Trust (hereafter the Trust), the organisation that manages the reserve, by taking part in various Trust events and activities. To address the questions I raise in my thesis, I decided that I would continue to take an ethnographic approach and gather data through participant observation, but that I would also conduct semi-structured interviews and implement a questionnaire. To add to my understanding of the research setting, as I shared in and observed the social world I also observed the nonhuman world of the reserve. In addition, I took part in any activity that immersed me in the company of the reserve's fauna and flora. I took part in various activities, such as organised wildlife surveying and monitoring exercises, and, whenever possible, spent time alone in the reserve exploring every corner of the landscape in all seasons and, on many occasions, spending the night in the reserve camping and sleeping in a tent.

I will now describe in more detail how I engaged in participant observation, conducted twenty-eight interviews, introduced a questionnaire into the process of data gathering and endeavoured, by immersing myself in the research setting, to engage with the landscape and the lives of the nonhuman inhabitants of the reserve. Before moving on to explain my data gathering methods, I must emphasise that although I discuss these as if they were discrete activities, in the field, various methods were occurring contemporaneously.

## Participant Observation

During my MA and PhD research, a substantial proportion of fieldwork time was spent participating with and observing the Thursday volunteers. I participated with them on an almost weekly basis for four years from 2010 until 2014, during which time I joined the staff and volunteers in whatever practical work was being carried out. I took part in woodland management tasks, such as; clearing rides and paths of fallen trees and branches; felling trees – including felling a thirty-foot oak tree with a hand saw, planting trees and digging ditches. I also spent ten Thursdays building a new bridge over the reserve's eighteen

foot wide river, constructed both modern wire and traditional oak fences, burned waste wood in a kiln to make charcoal, and spent many days coppicing. One of the most rewarding experiences was hand splitting eight-foot long, ten-inch diameter oak logs for fencing. To split them we used wedges and when these were positioned skilfully the log split with a most rewarding hiss.

After I negotiated access to the Thursday volunteer group, the mechanics of carrying out a day's participant observation of woodland management activities was relatively uncomplicated. I only had to arrive at the reserve at nine a.m. on Thursdays to be assured of a day's participant observation. However, since it was important not to allow my data gathering to interfere with my acceptance as a volunteer, I followed, as far as I understood them, the conventions of the Thursday volunteers' 'game'.

To broaden my understanding of the social world of the reserve I also took part in any social activity in which the Thursday volunteers and staff engaged. Each year I took part in the volunteers' annual Christmas visits to another reserve and the pub lunch that followed. I also spent many afternoons in a local pub after a day's volunteering, with one or two of the volunteers, to chat about the day and reflect on our own and others' involvement with the reserve and the Trust. The pub at this time of day was the venue for 'after work pints' where I had the opportunity to observe and, in some cases, get to know the local workers who called in after their day's work. These workers were predominantly men who worked in the locality and often had longstanding ties with Horwood. They provided me with a different perspective from that of my informants.

As I participated with the Thursday volunteers, I also became aware that they were a small part of a much larger social network. To access this larger network I took part in as many of the wildlife events organised by the Trust as possible. Each year I took part in the reserve's three a.m. dawn chorus walk that takes place on the first Sunday of May. I also attended the annual general meeting of the Trust, volunteer conferences and open days at other reserves managed by the Trust. Involvement in this way helped me get a glimpse of the staff and volunteers outside the confines of the reserve and broadened my understanding

of the place, and the roles of the staff and volunteers in their wider social networks. Taking part in such events also assisted me in contextualising the reserve in relation to local communities, and environmental and conservation movements.

By volunteering with the Thursday volunteers, I experienced the everyday life of the reserve that managed the reserve's woodland. However, this did not give me access to participating in everyday activities that resulted in the acquisition of understanding and knowledge of the ecology and natural history of the reserve. That was mainly gained through surveying and monitoring the woodland and its wildlife. To access these areas of the everyday life of the reserve I participated in numerous surveying and monitoring exercises: I took part in a number of one-day surveys, a three-week nightingale survey, and two bat surveys that each took place over a two to three-week period. The length of the nightingale survey was determined by the need not to miss any night when they could be singing in and around the reserve, and the bat survey's timeline was determined by the 'life' of the tracking device fitted to the bats.

Being known to the surveying and monitoring volunteers through my involvement with the Thursday volunteers was relatively unproblematic, especially with Ted continuing to act as my gatekeeper (the individual who facilitates a researcher's access to a social setting), and by joining the various groups who carried out surveying and monitoring. However, although surveying and monitoring took place as part of a long-term programme of investigation, I discovered that becoming a participant observer was complicated by the way the surveys were organised and carried out by different groups.

I spent a great deal of time engaging in surveying and monitoring, however I did not establish the same degree of 'connectedness' with these volunteers that I achieved with the Thursday volunteers. My 'connectedness' with the surveying and monitoring volunteers after spending night after night tracking bats or seeking out nightingales was intense but ephemeral, and did not continue once the project was completed.

Participating in surveying and monitoring gave me access to the world of the staff and volunteers, and through these activities I also became to some extent engaged with the nonhuman world. However this was limited, and in order to deepen my contact and become with this world, I began to spend time exploring the woods and camping overnight. The primary difference between the immersive experiences of surveying and monitoring and camping was that when I camped I was, mostly, alone.

To experience the nonhuman world of the reserve as distantly from the social life of the reserve as possible, I would arrive in the morning and spend the remainder of the day walking in the woods alone. At night I would pitch my tent and attempt to sleep. I selected the campsites to suit my mood after being in the reserve all day. My behaviour was related to the season of the year: in early May I camped amongst the bluebells, in late May near the singing nightingales, and in October amongst the wild service trees. By walking, being alone and camping in the reserve I experienced the outdoors in a way that I had never previously experienced it and this provided me with an intimate understanding of the outdoors that had previously escaped me. My aim at the outset was to spend a twenty-four hour period in the reserve during each month of the year, but this resolve deserted me as the weather conditions deteriorated and the nights lengthened. I still have to reach my objective of the challenge of spending a day and night in the reserve during the winter months of November, December, January and February. I found being alone in the reserve's woodland at night a cathartic experience that caused me to re-examine my understanding of being-in-the-world. The woodland at night was unsettling; in the darkness the balance between the social and nonhuman realm shifted as the human realm lost its dominance.

## Interviewing Staff and Volunteers

I introduced interviewing into my research in order to explore my informants' understanding of specific topics that were particularly relevant to my inquiry, and to provide evidence to validate my findings. I conducted and audio-recorded informal semi-scripted interviews with twenty-eight of the Trust's staff and volunteers. These interviewees became my sample for my study of the

social actors who participate in the everyday life of the reserve. Details of my informants' roles in the reserve, age, education and the activities they take part in are listed in the table in the section entitled Informant Sample later in this chapter.

All of the interviewees had been involved with the reserve for over a year. Eighteen men and ten women were interviewed. The youngest volunteers were in their early twenties and the oldest in their early seventies. Of the twenty-eight individuals interviewed, ten were under thirty-nine years of age, four were aged between forty and sixty, and fourteen were over sixty years of age. All of the staff members were under forty, as were the bat monitors, except for the group leader Eric. My shortest interview lasted less than fifteen minutes and the longest was over an hour. However, in the fourteen-minute interview all of the questions from my interview schedule were answered as the informant gave concise but full answers. I personally transcribed all of the audio recordings.

The second category I identified to aid my analyses are those who engage in activities that are directed towards the conservation management of the reserve's woodland and wildlife. I further made a distinction between the paid employees of the Trust and unpaid volunteers. These categories were observable in the field from the way in which staff and volunteers conducted themselves, and from the social networks in which they engaged. I also distinguished between the general body of volunteers and bat monitoring volunteers as, although the latter also engaged in practical conservation management, they stood apart from the general body of volunteers and belonged to social networks that were less integrated with the other social networks of the reserve.

I distinguished between those who participate in general conservation activities and volunteers who engaged only in the monitoring of bats. Although spending a substantial amount of time in the reserve, the bat monitors, are not integrated into the wider social networks of the reserve and Trust. This contrasts starkly with the general conservation volunteers, who are the basis of the social networks of the reserve and to a lesser extent the Trust. Conservation volunteers were also further divided by how they contribute their time to the general

conservation work of the reserve and Trust. Fifteen volunteers contribute through taking part as volunteers on a Thursday, and make a substantial contribution to the enormous labour that the conservation of the reserve requires.

The staff and volunteers who became the focus of my study are few in number in relation to the total number of people who have some form of involvement in the everyday life of the reserve. In spite of this, they are the body of participants who engage in caring for the reserve and through their actions affect the way in which other social actors experience it. They also act as an interface between visitors and other participants and organisations that engage with the reserve. It falls to staff and volunteers to interpret the multiple wildlife discourses with which they are confronted before implementing these in the reserve. The staff and volunteers' actions are, however, closely associated with the meaning that the reserve holds for them personally. The contributions that staff and volunteers make to the material well-being of the lives of the nonhumans of the reserve, are also linked to the meaning that the reserve has for them; whether poacher, staff member, volunteer, or dog walker, an individual's involvement in the everyday life of the reserve is guided by what is meaningful to them personally. Individuals may be swayed by argument and discourse, but the foundations of their actions are closely associated with their biography and life trajectory.

Many individuals and organisations contribute to the everyday life of the reserve. Throughout my fieldwork I endeavoured to engage with whomsoever I could in order to gain the widest understanding of who participated in the everyday life of the reserve, and the context in which they did so. I achieved this through taking an open approach to what was within the scope of my participant observation fieldwork. I acquainted myself with a wide range of people and organisations that I 'found' engaging with the reserve. Fieldwork brought me into contact with poachers, rough-shooters, dog walkers, local, national and international visitors, walkers and runners, bird watchers, entomologists, foragers, green woodworkers, moth enthusiasts, forestry contractors, coppicers, school parties, university students, and corporate and



other volunteer groups. I also engaged with local residents and participated in a number of local community events in order to understand the local community's relationships with Horwood, the Trust and the reserve. Since the Trust as owners and administrators of the reserve had a significant role in the everyday life of the reserve, I took part whenever possible, in meetings and events initiated by the trust at its headquarters and other reserves. Where possible I also cultivated relationships with Trust staff in order to understand the organisation's policies, practices and social networks.

Interviews were normally conducted so as not to interfere with the dynamics of the activities taking place. Early in the day, I would clear it with the staff leader and then discuss with the interviewee when they thought it would be best to slip away to carry out an interview. A digital recorder was my constant companion. In the 'interview' literature arguments are made for the conducting of interviews in the research setting (Anderson, 2004). I accepted such arguments in all cases but one, and conducted all of my other interviews in the geographical proximity of the activity being undertaken. Interviewing in the field and in the close proximity of other staff and volunteers was problematic, as interviews were often interrupted if they took place near to a work party. Interruption and background noise were only a minor problem during the interviews themselves, but when I was transcribing interviews, volunteers' mobile ringtones, wind blowing over the microphone and, on one occasion, a nest of twittering swallows created a major distraction during the transcription progress. Transcribing is a time-consuming and laborious process even at the best of times and is not improved when transcribing from low quality recordings. Recording in the field may have the advantage of not distancing the interview from the setting, however from my experience it introduced too many distractions, and I would in future interview in the field, but only if it was possible to withdraw into a quieter private space to carry out interviews.

## Introducing a Questionnaire

When I was gathering demographic data and considering ways of validating my findings by triangulation, I considered introducing a questionnaire that would establish demographic 'facts' about my informants and add a qualitative element

to my research. I based this questionnaire on the 2001 National Census questionnaire, with a further section devoted to asking informants about their 'connectedness' to nature using the New Environmental Paradigm Scale as developed by Dunlap *et al.* (2000), and the Connectedness to Nature Scale Mayer and Franz (2004). At the time I decided to use these scales, they appeared to be credible instruments as they had been in use for thirty and eight years respectively.

I anticipated asking a large number of Horwood Nature Reserve social actors to complete the questionnaire. My aims were that the first part would establish the age, social class, gender, ethnicity, education, employment, rural or urban residence characteristics and social class of the interviewee, and the second would show informants' attitudes to the environment and 'nature'. The scales would serve three purposes: to identify participants' attitudes to the wider environment and the natural world; to assist in the selection of participants to be interviewed in more depth to establish their wildlife and conservation narrative; and as an elicitation device to stimulate interviewees' disclosure of the meanings they attach to woodland and wildlife.

After formulating the questionnaire, I 'tested' it by asking three of my informants to appraise and provide their opinions. They were highly critical of both sections of the questionnaire; they found some of the demographical questions intrusive and questions in the Scale to be unanswerable. For example George, who is one of the informants most closely connected to the natural world, ridiculed a question as being too 'hippyish' for him to answer it seriously. The question asked for a reply – on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree – which addressed the following statement: I feel that all inhabitants of Earth, human, and nonhuman, share a common 'life force'.

With similarly negative responses from my other informants, I discarded the idea of using a questionnaire in my research and concurred with Brewer's (2000 p.18) view that the inclusion of quantitative methods in ethnographic research seems to distance the research from its aim of studying, as he sees it, '...people in naturally occurring settings'.

## Data and Analysis

During my fieldwork I maintained a field journal. With my field notes, interview transcripts and written contributions from informants entered into NVIVO my data was analysed through a process of coding. Multiple themes emerged from this coding, and those themes that appeared to be most relevant to the ethnographic portrayal of the research setting were further analysed. For this stage of analysis, use was made of the text search capabilities of NVIVO. My text queries, although not of statistical significance, were valuable as they drew matters to my attentions that were significant to my informants and worthy of further qualitative analysis. For example, through NVIVO I became aware that to explain some experiences, my informants used the words ‘magic’ and ‘magical’. I began searching in my text for references to magic and magical and found that these words were used more by women than men by a proportion of three to one. After this rather rule-of-thumb analysis, I continued to reflect on those events and encounters referred to as ‘magical’, which in turn led me to explore the emotional and spiritual context of my informants’ involvement with the reserve’s woodland and wildlife.

## Methodological Challenges

I found two issues particularly problematic throughout my research. The first was a result of occupying a dual role as a participant observer researcher and as an ‘ordinary’ member of the Thursday Volunteer Group. The second related to developing a theoretical framework to analyse the intersection of the natural–social world setting of my study, and how to involve myself as a participant observer in the nonhuman entanglements of the reserve. I will now explain how I approached these issues by framing the former in terms of autoethnography, and the latter in terms of multispecies ethnography.

## Autoethnography

Reflexivity has been embedded in my research process. I have referenced my own experiences throughout my thesis as a means of illustrating my findings. However, on reflection I consider I have moved beyond the use of my experiences as an aid to illustrate my findings to their being substantive findings

in themselves, and this has drawn me into the territory of autoethnography. In this section, I address the emergence of autoethnography as a method of my study.

As a research method, autoethnography recognises the value of introducing and making apparent the researcher's experience during and after the research process. However there is considerable debate as to how best to utilise the ethnographer's contribution to research. The presence of the ethnographer in ethnographic research is inescapable, although he or she may become written out or a dominant presence in the work. In my research design there was no intention of the thesis being an autoethnography from the start, however, two processes of the research raised my presence in this ethnography to a level that was not anticipated. The first of these involved engaging in the research setting as a complete participant observer, which resulted in my becoming a regular member of the Thursday Volunteer Group. The second was through using my experiences to help illustrate my analysis of the behaviour and actions of others. Both of these brought my presence to the fore in a way that could be considered to be autoethnographic.

I have been particularly aware of the issues surrounding the place and role of the researcher in all stages of the research process – particularly in the presentation of the final ethnography. These issues are not new to ethnography, and can be observed in all of Denzin's taxonomic ethnographic 'moments' where he highlights the 'nature' of ethnography at particular stages of its evolution; from a form of research that defined anthropology to becoming recognised and accepted as a useful research vehicle throughout the social sciences and humanities. However, such issues, although always present, have not always been recognised as important and worthy of debate.

In the current postmodern ethnographic 'moment' many authors such as Ellis and Bochner (2006), and Ellis (2007), have placed themselves centre stage in the ethnographic research process, and as central characters in the resulting ethnography. This has prompted other authors such as Anderson (2006) to critique this approach. Denzin (2006) identifies these authors' approaches

respectively as creative analytical autoethnography and analytical autoethnography. The differences in these approaches are so great that Denzin (2006 p.420) suggests that comparing them is like comparing '[a]pples and oranges'.

To identify the differences of these approaches Denzin (2006 p.420) cites Jones's (2005 p.765) definition of creative analytic autoethnography:

Autoethnography is a blurred genre . . . it is setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections between life and art . . . making a text present . . . refusing categorization . . . believing that words matter and writing toward the moment when the point of creating autoethnographic texts is to change the world.

Denzin (ibid. p.419) contrasts this by citing Anderson's (2006 p.375) definition of analytic autoethnography:

Analytic autoethnography has five key features. It is ethnographic work in which the researcher (a) is a full member in a research group or setting; (b) uses analytic reflexivity; (c) has a visible narrative presence in the written text; (c) engages in dialogue with informants beyond the self; (d) is committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena.

Denzin (2006 p.421) identifies analytical autoethnography in line with traditional Chicago school ethnography that did not 'write messy vulnerable texts that make you cry . . . They rather keep their eye on the goal of describing the world with their methods,' (p.421). This analytic autoethnographic approach is illustrated in Throsby's (2016) ethnography of extreme sport swimming and Wacquant's (2004) of boxing. Denzin's observation frames my approach to the introduction of autoethnography to my study. I wish to use my own experiences to aid the description and explanation of how involvement in the everyday life of the reserve contributes to my informants' mode of being-in-the-world, yet without becoming obsessed with exploring my own way of being-in-the-world.

## Biography and Autoethnography

In this section, I explain how the conduct of my research is related to my biography.

In early life I experienced a tight-knit industrial working-class culture rich in social capital, but one that was sadly lacking in economic and cultural capital. However, on leaving a secondary modern school at the age of fifteen, and entering employment, I worked hard to compensate for my lack of economic and cultural capital. I made a start on this project by ‘escaping’ the industrial Black Country by taking up horticultural employment in the nearby city of Birmingham with all of its cultural ‘sophistication’. I read the Manchester Guardian on my bus journey to work each day.

However, not all of my disadvantages (of early life) can be attributed to a lack of cultural and economic capital. I have been ‘diagnosed’ as dyslexic as has my son, and as I have for many years, suspected my brother to have been. Both my brother and I were the victims of an education system that failed to recognise dyslexia as a disability, and sent us into the employment market with minimal academic skills. However, with a working-class mother who had aspirations for her children, lack of ability in one area of life could be compensated for in other ways. For her, this involved using the natural skills one had, and applying these through hard work and this came to be the challenge of our lives.

The diligence of ethnography was therefore appealing, as was the challenge it posed to my academic capabilities and, particularly, my writing ability, which at best was poor and generally inadequate. Nevertheless it is the sort of challenge to which I respond, and which I rationalise as being both the consequence of genetics and cultural experience. From my reading of ethnographic monographs, it soon became apparent to me that ethnography, as a form of research, is a form of hard work to which I could apply myself.

When I entered the academic world as a fifty-year-old, mature student I was confused about the role of the researcher in research. I was greatly relieved

when I discovered reflexivity, and the acceptance of the centrality of the researcher's biography to the research process. Mills (2000 [1959]) was a leading contender in emphasising the role of biography in the direction and form taken by an individual's sociological research interests, and this is also noted by Wolcott (2008). The constructive contribution ethnographic research can make to the life of the researcher is also important to me as a researcher. If, as I now understand it, reading the Manchester Guardian was the first step I made in adding to my cultural capital, doing ethnography now appears to be yet another step in the same journey.

In my early days of academic study I read classical ethnographic monographs with great enthusiasm such as Whyte's (1955) *Street Corner Society*, Evans-Prichard's (1937) *Witchcraft Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* and the more current works of Wacquant (2004) *Body and Soul*, Desmond (2007) *On the Fireline*, and Duneier (2001) *Sidewalk Society*. I used these to develop my understanding of ethnography and to set a standard of what was possible for ethnographic research. My view of the value of the ethnographer being visibly present is also that of Atkinson (1990 p.110) who considers that the ethnographer's narrative 'does not, therefore, detract from the credibility and plausibility of the ethnographic account. On the contrary, its very confessional quality can help to reinforce the narrative contract between the text and the implied reader'.

In accepting the role of my biography in my research, I recognised that I should embrace my practical 'doing' strengths and use these in the most effective way possible. To this end I conducted my research from Geertz's (1973) perspective that ethnography is defined by how the research is done rather than by its theoretical construction. I therefore 'threw' myself into engaging with the landscape and wildlife of the reserve, and with the Trust's social networks.

## Insider–Outsider

During my fieldwork, I became a regular member of the Thursday volunteer group and participated in many other Trust activities. I became accepted as a regular Trust volunteer. My research and I became integrated into the research

setting, and my interest in sociology came to be treated by the staff and volunteers as simply another ‘passion’ similar to theirs for birds, moths, fungi, butterflies, poetry or science. Although natural history interests were generally considered to have some obvious value, sociology was stereotyped as the pursuit of the obvious and a long and complex route to common sense. My research became something of a ‘mascot’ for the Thursday volunteer group. Many of my informants appeared to think that their group being identified as worthy of study enhanced the standing of the Thursday volunteers.

The only time when my relationship with members of the Thursday volunteer group was problematic was when I personally failed to understand the rules and ‘play the game’ that was expected of me as a researcher within the group. Through my preoccupation with my research I on one particular occasion lost touch with the ‘rules’ for a time and crossed an invisible line. For example, I was reprimanded by my gatekeeper for appearing to give, as some participants interpreted it, kudos to some members by interviewing them and denigrating others by not interviewing them. I was in fact just working through the group as people became available for interview. However, no long-term harm came to my relationship with the staff and volunteers because of this episode.

Wolcott (2008) identifies ethnographic research as being appealing to researchers for many reasons. The reason I most identified with it was the opportunity of integrating professional and personal life-skills that I have acquired through taking a practical hands-on approach to the challenges of life with my research. Wacquant’s (2015 pp.4-5) advice to ‘dive in’ resonates with me; but from my experience of life one should, as he notes, be cautious of ‘reckless abandon’.

To make the most of ethnography, the field sociologist must methodically mine and thematize the fact that, like every social agent, he [sic] comes to know his object *by body*; and he [sic] can leverage carnal comprehension by deepening his social and symbolic insertion into the universe he studies. . . . The methodological stipulation here is to dive into the stream of action to the greatest possible depth, rather than watch it from the bank; but to dive and



swim along with method and purpose, and not with reckless abandon that would cause us to drown in the bottomless whirlpool of subjectivism.

To my research, Wacquant's caution over reckless abandon is a salutary message, as from time to time my own enthusiasm for 'diving in' has led me to experience not only the advantages but also some of the disadvantages of 'going native'. The phrase 'going native' is often attributed to Malinowski in his reflections on the relationship between the anthropologist and the objects of study in ethnographic fieldwork (Kanuha, 2000 p.439). I consider that my experiences would be better conceptualised as that of an insider participant observer rather than as 'going native'. There is substantial literature on going native, and the role of the insider-outsider researcher (see Labaree, 2002).

Two incidents amongst many stand out as illustrating the value and dilemma of being an insider researcher. On my first visit to the reserve to negotiate access with Ted, who became my gatekeeper, a bird that had not been seen in the reserve before made us aware of its presence by its piping call. I was able to identify it from its call and general appearance but Ted was unsure. However, he later told me that this incident reassured him that giving me access would be OK as my natural history knowledge would give me credibility in the eyes of the other volunteers. Labaree (2002 p.104) identifies insiderness as being a:

categorical advantage cited in the literature . . . that insiderness facilitates greater access at the start of one's research, to special groups within the community, and to critical information. This is perhaps the most universally accepted advantage given to being an insider.

The second incident involved some responses George gave when interviewed. I developed my interview schedule on the basis of my knowledge of social actors' behaviour and it included questions about favourite places in the reserve, plants and animals and seasons of the year. Most of my interviewees responded as expected: they had favourite places, plants and animals and times of the year and often situations where these occurred in particular combinations. When I

interviewed George however, he appeared to prevaricate and gave only what seemed to be the most general of replies. He said he would just walk anywhere in the reserve at any time of the year and just ‘mooch’ around. This was not the reply I was expecting. My insider knowledge of the ways of social actors with a general interest in the outdoors and wildlife caused me to expect a reply about his ‘favourites’ in the natural world. However, I later realised that for George the natural world *is* his favourite. Without doubt, at the time, I failed to recognise issues that were relevant to my research because I was too close to them, and in consequence I failed to critically observe and analyse what was obviously of significance to my understanding of what the woodland and wildlife of the reserve meant to the staff and volunteers. I expected others to act towards and to experience the reserve in the way I experienced it, and find meaning as I had, just because we shared similar interests in the natural world. In this instance, being an insider was a disadvantage.

In his review of the literature, Labaree (2002) found that there is a general assumption that, for participant observers, being an insider has advantages and aids access and understanding of the culture, but he also found that being an insider creates ethical issues around disclosure, relationships and disengagement. However, as it is argued in the literature, and as I found myself, being an insider or outsider is a false dichotomy. I found, as Labaree (ibid. p.101) did in his research that: ‘the boundaries of insiderness are situational and defined by the perceptions of those being researched’. My interest, knowledge and approach to the natural world in the eyes of my informants made me one of them at the same time as my biography and role of researcher set me (to some extent) apart. Although I was an insider in the case of the immediate social network of my informants, at no time was I an insider to the Trust’s organisation, administration and social network. My situation conformed to Deutsch’s (1981 p.174) idea that as researchers ‘we are all multiple insiders and outsiders,’ and that in this situation a tension is created that, if engaged with, can aid the researcher in taking advantage of being an insider, without incurring the problems that are associated with ‘going native’.

## Multispecies Ethnography

It would be disingenuous to claim that at the outset of my fieldwork my plan was to engage in a multispecies ethnography. However, it could be argued that the immersive experiences that emerged from my involvement in woodland management practices, surveying and monitoring and particularly the experiences of being ‘alone’ for a full day and night in the ancient woodland of the reserve meant that I had become engaged in multispecies ethnography.

Ogden *et al.* (2013 p.6) conceptualises multispecies ethnography as follows:

multispecies ethnography is a project that seeks to understand the world as materially real, partially knowable, multicultured and multinatured, magical, and emergent through the contingent relations of multiple beings and entities. Accordingly, the nonhuman world of multispecies encounters has its own logic and rules of engagement that exist within the larger articulations of the human world, encompassing the flow of nutrients and matter, the liveliness of animals, plants, bacteria, and other beings.

When my own immersive experience placed my social body in the company of multiple beings and entities in unexpected circumstances, I was more able to experience the ‘material reality’ and ‘liveliness’ of the nonhuman world. It was a bodily experience that changed how I engaged with and experienced the nonhuman world.

Since the age of ten or eleven I have watched birds, and this has been one way that I have encountered the nonhuman world. Birds have been ‘objects’ to observe and a reason for being in the outdoors in landscapes that ‘spoke’ to me although I rarely felt I belonged. My immersive experiences during fieldwork provided me with an alternative experience. I experienced a sense of belonging – being a part of the woodland landscape. In my own case, this I attribute to the realisation that the nonhumans around me had a ‘liveliness’ that I had previously failed to perceive. It was the realisation that the nightingales, silver-washed fritillary butterflies and wild service trees had lives that are purposeful even if the purpose of their lives was outside of my everyday perception and

understanding.

Like my informants, I have experienced magical encounters with the reserve's woodland and flora and fauna, and found myself lost for words when I have endeavoured to impart to others the meaning that such experiences and the reserve have for me. Like my informants, I find myself not only unable to explain the experience, I also often return to recounting the same events as a means of explaining my relationship with the reserve. I find that by returning to and recounting the same event I am more able to refine my explanation of my experiences by relating these to my general and specific habitus. I have a personal disposition towards the affective rather than the rational, but I am aware that the rationality of the 'fields' in which my specific habitus developed has a substantial influence on how I experience the reserve, its woodland and its flora and fauna. My horticultural habitus, the consequence of employment in the horticulture field for fifty-four years shapes my experience of the reserve's woodland and wildlife.

As I reflect on my participation in the everyday life of the reserve, during my fieldwork I came to appreciate that two things are important to me and relate to my own habitus: a need to belong to a community, and a need to engage with wildlife and particularly with plants. To illustrate the sense of community I experienced through participation in the reserve's activities, I use two scenarios from the daily life of the reserve. The first is how my informants always came together in a circle at break times and how central this is to the day's events. The second is the social interactions around the bonfire as the brash from coppicing is burned. To explain the meaning that the reserve's flora and fauna have for me, I usually refer to three encounters; my experience of silver-washed fritillary butterflies as we gathered firewood; nights spent camping in the woods with the nightingales; and waking beneath wild service trees one misty October morning, after a cold night's camping, to be confronted with a grey woodland filled with the amber, autumn-colour of wild service trees.

To further contextualise my position in the research, and to flag up my own dispositions towards research, I will reflect on my habitus.

As mentioned earlier, I grew up in a 1950s industrial working-class community – a ‘field’ of social relations based on ‘community’. Through developing my understanding of habitus in the process of my research I have been able to appreciate that ‘community’ is key to my habitus. However, for most of the time, the need for ‘community’ has been an unconscious element of my habitus. Bourdieu (1977) postulates that many of the dispositions of a person’s habitus operate at the level of the unconscious. To some extent involvement in the social life of the reserve meets my need for community.

More conscious than my disposition towards involvement in ‘community’ has been my life-long engagement with ornamental plants. This interest emerged when I was five and its direction of development was, I now perceive, an outcome of a particular working-class socialisation. My practical career in horticulture was the outcome of a working-class socialisation as Willis (1997) portrays in *Learning to Labour*, in which he demonstrates how working-class boys are socialised to do working-class jobs. I can relate to this form of working-class socialisation, even though the career I took up was outside of the conventional industrial manufacturing field to which I was socialised. I transposed my practical working-class dispositions to a comparable employment field, but to one that was less restrictive of the possibilities of working-class boys advancing in educational and social environments.

Bourdieu conceptualises work and education as areas which involve specific cultural fields of power that socialise those that are engaged in these fields to the specific “rules of the game”. A considerable part of my life followed this path; however, my general habitus has had considerable bearing on my life course, and has emerged with greater significance in later life as I now have more opportunities to explore, more generally, my affective relationship with plants and wildlife.

Community and flowering plants are central to my general habitus, and the most meaningful events for me in my involvement with the reserve have been becoming a part of the reserve’s community, as well as my developing

connection with plants in the form of wild service trees. My encounter with these trees in the reserve over six years, as I slept in their presence at night, found and collected their fruit, germinated the seeds I collected, and grew two hundred young trees to planting size, has been an experience that I can only describe as ‘magical’. During this magical experience my actions, some conscious and some not, have been related to both my general and specific habitus. Gaining an academic understanding of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, has brought me closer to perceiving how unconscious we are of our surroundings for much of the time, and why we act in the ways that we do. This realisation has led me to understand that my informants may also be unconscious of what causes them to act in the way they do and that I could not necessarily expect them to explain the reasons behind their actions.

## Informant Sample

Below set out in tabulated form is a list of my informants detailing their gender, age, educational and vocational qualifications, and the conservation activities in which they are involved. They are arranged by their roles within the reserve (staff member or volunteer group member). Gender and education levels are denoted by a single asterisk (\*), while the conservation activities they participate in are denoted by multiple asterisks (\*\*\*, \*\*, \*). The number of asterisks signifies the extent of their involvement.

**Gender:** There are considerably more men than women among the Thursday group, and the surveying and monitoring volunteers and this is also the case with the staff. However, the gender balance amongst the bat volunteers is equal.

**Age:** The staff and bat volunteers are significantly younger than the other category.

**Education:** Only one informant has neither university nor professional qualifications. However, his practical skills and knowledge of the countryside and nature more than compensate for his lack of academic qualifications.

**Activities:** Participation in the social network of the reserve is clearly displayed

by the activities in which staff and volunteers are involved. The bat volunteers are only loosely associated with the reserve's wider social network.

THE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS		Gender		Age			Qualifications			Conservation Activities		
		Female	Male	19-39	40/59	60+	Bachelor's Degree	Post Graduate Degrees	Vocational Qualification	Woodland Management	Fauna and Flora Monitoring and Surveying	Bat Monitoring
Staff	Bell	*		*			*			***	***	
	Nick		*	*					*	***	**	
	Paul		*	*			*			***		
	Phil		*	*						***		
	Ted		*	*			*	*		***	***	*
Thursday Volunteers and the Surveying and Monitoring Volunteers	Adrian		*		*		*			***		
	Bert		*			*	*			***	**	
	Bob		*		*		*			***		
	Cliff		*			*	*			***		
	Dot	*				*	*				***	
	Erica	*				*	*	*		***	***	
	George		*			*	*			***	**	
	Jack		*			*	*				***	
	Jill	*				*	*				***	
	Joe		*			*	*	*		***	**	
	John		*			*	*			***		
	Kate	*			*		*			***	***	**
	Mary	*				*	*	*			***	
	Maud	*				*			*	***		
	Ron		*			*	*	*		***		
	Simon		*			*	*	*		***		
	Tim		*			*	*			***		
Monitoring Volunteers	Bill		*	*			*					***
	Dom		*	*					*			***
	Elly	*		*			*					***
	Lily	*		*			*					***
	Sid		*		*		*					***
	Sophie	*		*			*					***

Chart 3.1: The Staff and Volunteers

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained why and how I carried out an ethnographic study of Horwood Nature Reserve. I set out my reasons for taking an ethnographic approach before outlining the fieldwork methods used, and the practicalities of gathering data through participant observation, interviewing informants, and attempting to introduce a questionnaire. I then explained how I stored and analysed my data before addressing two important methodological issues that emerged during the research process: the role of autoethnography in my research, and the emergence of an element of multispecies ethnography.

These issues I consider emerged from the way I practiced participant observation. I engaged with both the social and natural world of the reserve to the extent that participant observation became participant immersion. Immersion gave me the opportunity to share more extensively in the experiences of the social actors of the reserve, and experience entanglements of the natural world that I had not previously encountered. Through immersion I

had experiences that not only added to my understanding of the everyday life of the reserve but also changed my own relationship with the natural world. I discovered that my informants had different modes of being-in-the-world that helped me to understand why I had for most of my life not been content with the way I engaged with the social and natural world around me.

By addressing the role of autoethnography and multispecies ethnography I have raised the subject of the role of the researcher's biography, being an insider–outsider researcher and how immersion in the research setting can lead to ways of engaging with natural world entanglements that aid the practice of multispecies ethnography.



## Chapter Four

### The Reserve

In this chapter I introduce, through the perceptions of the staff and volunteers, the woodland and wildlife context in which the everyday life of the reserve unfolds. The actors involved participate in the life of the reserve for many different reasons and in many different ways. However, they *all* place great value on its woodland and wildlife, and take an active role in ‘caring’ for the reserve. The reserve’s staff and volunteers distinguish themselves from recreational visitors, walkers, cross-country runners and dog walkers, who may also greatly value the reserve but are ‘bystanders’ rather than active participants in its maintenance.

#### Chapter Aims

The aim of this chapter is twofold: the first aim is to establish the wildlife and landscape contexts in which the everyday life of the reserve unfolds; and the second is to draw attention to the importance of the woodland and wildlife to people’s experience of involvement within that context. Sociological research involving the study of material entities, such as woodland and wildlife as active ‘agents’ of social life, has been limited to date. To bring woodland and wildlife within a sociological gaze, I have looked beyond sociology to concepts formulated by authors from other disciplines. Especially those who address the questions and issues of being-in-the-world such as Despret (2004), Haraway (2008), Ingold (1993), Nettleton (2013), and Whitehead (2004). As the reader will recall, I outlined these authors’ concepts of being-in-the-world in the Literature Review (Chapter Two). These authors are drawn on to question the sociological tradition of separating the social from the natural world.

In this chapter, the material conditions of the reserve are introduced to the reader through staff and volunteers’ perceptions of the reserve’s woodland and wildlife. I discussed the reasons for selecting this group of staff and volunteers as the focus of my study in Chapter Three. The reader will recall that the social actors involved in this study were selected because of their commitment to the

well-being of the reserve, and the exceptional amount of time and effort they contributed towards caring for the woodland and its wildlife.

This practice of ‘care’ distinguishes staff and volunteers from recreational visitors – such as photographers, walkers and runners – who for the most part, although contributing to the landscape by their movement through the woodland, have little other impact on the reserve and its landscape. Recreational visitors may benefit from their engagement with the reserve, but the reserve gains little material benefit from these visitors.

To establish the context in which these social agents move, rather than rely on extensive physical descriptions of the woodland landscape I explore staff and volunteers’ perceptions of the reserve. Although I draw attention to particular social actors and what is meaningful to them, it is important to keep in mind the holistic nature of social actors’ involvement; the meaningful encounters I cite are used to increase the visibility of the material–human interactions that are but a part of being-in-the-world.

This chapter is ordered in the following way: the first section focuses on the way in which the woodland affects staff and volunteers’ experience of the reserve, while the second focuses on the contribution of wildlife to the social actors’ experiences.

This section of the chapter is guided by Ingold’s contention that landscape is more than a backdrop to social life as there is a reciprocal relationship between the landscape and its social actors. I use this contention to explore staff and volunteers’ perceptions of the woodland in order to, firstly, demonstrate the contribution of the reserve’s material entities, the fauna and flora, to the everyday life of the reserve, and, secondly, the meaning that these entities have for staff and volunteers.

The vignettes I use in this chapter are drawn from the experience of specific social actors, however, they are also metaphors for the recurring themes of the everyday life of the reserve.

In Ingold's concept of 'dwelling', the role of social agents transcends those of bystanders in the landscape, so that they can be conceived of as 'dwelling' in the woodland. In the process:

landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves (Ingold, 1993 p.152).

Many miles of non-metalled roads and track ways create a web of access throughout the reserve and are a major feature of the landscape. The widest are known as 'trenches' and are defined by earth banks at either side. Each trench can measure up to 150 feet wide. Other roads known as 'rides' are narrower, while 'paths' are the narrowest and least defined of all. Animal trails are less visible than human access ways: often imperceptible to the unskilled human eye, these paths are used by a few of the staff and volunteers to penetrate the hidden heart of the woodland. George uses animal trails to seek out broadleaf helleborines, Nick to find fungi, and Frank uses them to seek the tranquillity and spirituality he craves, and finds, in the depths of the woodland.



Figure 4.1: The Great Trench

Major trenches such as The Great Trench, Carpenters Trench, Green Trench and

Lower Trench are familiar to all staff and volunteers. Many have an emotional or spiritual attachment to these trenches. The Great Trench is a geographical feature that bisects the woodland from north to south. It is a grassy and often muddy track that varies between 150 feet wide in places, to only 30 in others. All of the staff and volunteers have spent time working in The Great Trench or have used it as a thoroughfare. However, for many it is more than a work place or thoroughfare.

For Ted, The Great Trench has particular symbolic and historic connotations. Ted was a key informant who managed the reserve for eight years. He engaged with the reserve in multiple ways: as an employee of the Trust; a married, family man with young children; a naturalist; a woodland manager; and as a human geographer with an inclination toward sociology. His habitus has been shaped by involvement in a diverse range of cultural fields. For example, he was offered a place to study natural science at Cambridge, at the age of seventeen, but rejected this highly academic route in favour of more practical courses of study at an agricultural college, and at a less elitist university before entering the conservation world as a manager for the Trust.

When interviewed Ted said of The Great Trench:

it has this mediaeval feel – as if Robin Hood could jump out at you – it feels mediaeval if you close your eyes. When I picture the woods I picture a wonderful hugely wide trench with the woods on either side. That's in my mind how I think of the woods. It has a very ancient feel about it, and it's sort of mediaeval England trapped in this little bubble.

Feeling a sense of the past in the woodland is important to many of the staff and volunteers. In addition to emerging through the landscape, the past also shows up in the way in which the older mature oak and ash trees are viewed. The trees that escape the anonymity of the woodland to become known as individuals are usually of great age or size for their species. It is the old gnarled oak, the ancient ash coppice stool or the veteran silver birch that are identified as individuals in their own right, with many of the staff and volunteers having a

particular favourite specimen they can locate amongst the other trees of the woodland. Knowing and identifying with particular trees can add to an individual's cultural capital. Knowledge of such trees and their whereabouts gives status to individuals amongst their peers, as it indicates knowledge of the woodland that only immersion in it, and a deep awareness of trees can provide. Ted's favourite tree is an ancient gnarled oak that grows in The Great Trench, and George's favourite grows on the eastern boundary – he believes this to be the largest oak tree in the woods. It is thought that some ash stools are the oldest trees in the reserve, possibly three to four hundred years old and with the bulk and size of a small car. The ancient ash coppice stools captivate many coppicers. The practice of coppicing that produces coppice stools is discussed extensively in Chapter Six, however, in brief stools are the rootstock and lower stems of a tree that remain after most of the tree has been cut during the practice of coppicing.



Figure 4.2: Ancient Oak Tree in The Great Trench

For others, human artefacts such as earth banks and other archaeological features create a sense of the past. Simon explains he finds reassurance in continuity, and derives a sense of this from the reserve's archaeology:

I'm interested in archaeology and history and so on. In one of the meadows there have been regular archaeology digs of the Roman villa. I've volunteered on a couple of occasions and I found that really fascinating. I have actually dug up Roman coins. It really makes you feel that there have been people here before you. It's all part of the way that this place has been making me think that we are only here temporarily and there have been lots of people here before. It puts your life into perspective.

In Ingold's (1993) conceptualisation of 'dwelling', the sedimentation of history in the landscape is a key concept, and here Simon is using history to provide perspective on his life. Many of the staff and volunteers, particularly those who are older, 'find' in the reserve a reassuring sense of 'connection' with the past.

Unlike Ted and Simon, Sid provides a more literal description of The Great Trench. However, he still hints that The Great Trench connects him with the past when he reflects on what the countryside could be like in the absence of intensive agriculture:

it's quite interesting habitats . . . quite picturesque and obviously there's a lot more but some areas of Horwood are quite uniform and almost boring. I like it because it's a reminder of what the countryside could be if it wasn't for intensive agriculture. You have trees and scrub, tall grass, short grass, scalloped edge and the scrub that builds up into the woodland edge. I tend to feel that I will find things interesting in there, because of the different habitats . . . it's not as uniform as say a coppiced area. It also reminds me that there is some sort of history to the place. I ask myself questions like why are they [trenches] there? Are they lines of sight for the hunt or why are they there at all? Why is the forest structure the way it is? What is happening now and why? I try and take a step back from the politics of it all because I have a feeling that I'm not going to agree with some of what is being done. It [The Great Trench] is a bit of a microcosm I suppose for Horwood [and] the commons around the woods. I feel more at home there than I have anywhere really.

For Ted, Simon and Sid, the landscape of The Great Trench has specific historical connotations. Although other informants do not express their feelings about The Great Trench with such clarity, when talking of the reserve most refer to The Great Trench and the attraction it holds for them: even when they are perplexed by what it is that attracts them to this specific grassy track through the woodland.

The meanings that staff and volunteers find in their involvement in the landscape of the reserve are multifaceted: some prioritise the significance of the trenches, ancient trees and archaeology; others relate more closely to the different structures of the reserve's woodland. Management of the reserve through coppicing has resulted in a landscape that ranges from the highly controlled, an almost orchard-like landscape of young coppiced coupes to 'derelict coupes' that have not been coppiced in living memory. Staff and volunteers often show a preference for these derelict coupes because of their sense of 'wildness', naturalness and lack of human intervention. I attribute my personal preference for young coppiced woodland to the horticultural cultural field in which I have spent my working life. In this cultural field, 'power' is demonstrated through controlling plants and 'wildness' in plants and crops under production is undesirable. Jack has a preference for derelict coppices, which he refers to as 'high forest', and in which he finds a particular atmosphere; he commented, 'It's the feeling of being more ancient I suppose.' Another area of the reserve's woodland that is commonly referred to as a favourite place by staff and volunteers is Star Wood. It is favoured for its wildness, remoteness and lack of human presence and control. It also has the most prolific display of bluebells in the reserve's woodland (see Figure 8.1).

If the trenches, earth banks and trees are seen as the bones of the woodland, it is the non-woody and, particularly, the flowering plants and wildlife that give character to the body of the woodland. Although ephemeral in their flowering – and without the physical permanence of ancient oaks, earth banks and trenches – the flowering plants play a central part in the everyday life of the reserve. Their importance to staff and volunteers is demonstrated in the following

comments made by Jack, ‘We do like Star Wood . . . it's the best wood for bluebells . . . very few people go there and it has a charm about it which we like.’ Sturgeon Wood’s charm involves its status as a derelict coppice, its carpet of bluebells, and few people, all of which contribute to this wood being a favourite of Jack. Phil commented that . . . ‘working in an environment which has seas of bluebells . . . just mellows me out – there are only two places that mellow me out, a wood or a scrapyard.’ Whereas Phil links woodland and scrapyards to his attraction of the area, more conventionally, Erica linked the bluebells with spring and beauty when she commented, ‘the bluebells are amazing in the spring. They have this magic about them . . . the whole thing is beautiful’.

Ted draws a poetic picture of wildflowers, birdsong and scent in his following comments:

it’s the way you get the bluebells and wood anemone, purple orchids, the wood sorrel, the wood spurge and the celandine, and of course everything is together under the birdsong. With the scent it’s a really heady atmosphere. That’s how I think about it.

Ted emphasises the complexity of the sensory experiences involved, as social actors engage with the woodland and wildlife of the reserve and participate in its everyday life.

## Animal Landscapes

The previous section of this chapter focused on my informants’ perceptions of the reserve’s woodland, and how these could be understood in terms of Ingold’s concept of ‘dwelling’. From my research I understand Ingold’s contention, that a landscape is more than a backdrop to social life and a reciprocal relationship exists between the landscape and its social actors. My research design assumed that different theoretical frameworks would be required to analyse staff and volunteers’ perceptions of the reserve’s woodland and wildlife. I therefore developed my analysis using Ingold’s concepts of dwelling and ‘becoming with’ (as discussed in the Literature Review).



Throughout most of the research process, my initial research design was supported by my own personal experience of engaging with the reserve's landscape and wildlife. Prior to my fieldwork I engaged with the outdoor world and wildlife as a recreational visitor, whereas during my fieldwork I engaged in practices of 'caring' for the reserve's woodland and wildlife. As I became immersed in the woodland, the way I experienced and understood both it and its wildlife changed. Fieldwork became an immersive experience and transformed my role from visitor and spectator to a participant in the everyday events of woodland life. My sense of becoming a part of the woodland, and 'closer' to its wildlife was not a road-to-Damascus moment, but rather part of a growing satisfaction with being in the woodland's embrace. The woodland and its wildlife had worked their 'magic' on me, as they have on many who immerse themselves in such settings. In Chapter Eight of my thesis, the 'magic' of the reserve's woodland and wildlife is explored at length. Fieldwork experience reinforced my research design, as I related my own changing experience of being-in-the-world to the concept of 'dwelling' and 'becoming' that is addressed in Ingold's extensive body of work.

As my analysis of the data developed, the usefulness of envisaging staff and volunteers as 'dwelling' in the reserve's woodland became apparent. However, when analysing the relationships that surveyors and monitors had with what they were monitoring, the concept of 'becoming with' (as formulated by Haraway) became less useful as a mechanism for explaining the inordinate amounts of time and effort Sid, Dot, and Ron spent monitoring birds, butterflies, bats and dormice. In my endeavour to understand this monitor-wildlife relationship, I returned to the relevant literature on which Haraway's concept of 'becoming with' was founded. In particular I explored Halewood's interpretation of Whitehead's philosophy of 'becoming'. A full engagement with Whitehead's philosophy is beyond the scope of my thesis, however coming to Whitehead's thoughts and ideas in the later stages of my analysis had certain advantages. In particular, it altered my understanding of the monitor-animal relationship. I had initially taken it as given that the object of the monitoring – the dormouse – was the basis of the relationship, whereas on reflection this appears not to be the case. Even for Dot after twenty years of engaging with

dormice, it became apparent that what had meaning for her was more than could be explained through her relationship with the dormice of her study. I propose that during the process of monitoring social actors become immersed in the woodland, and through this immersion they experience being-in-the-world-with-‘nature’. In the remainder of this chapter I will demonstrate how wildlife monitoring involves the social actors not only with the object of their study, but with the woodland and wildlife of the reserve more generally. In the following section attention moves to the animals of the reserve and the contribution they make to its everyday life.

In contrast to the landscape where the trees, shrubs and flowering plants are ever present, the presence of wild animals in the everyday life of the reserve is much more shadowy. For staff and volunteers, other than those involved in monitoring wildlife, encounters with wild animals are mostly fleeting. Such encounters, however, are often meaningful to the social actor involved. Often these brief, meaningful encounters were described by my informants as ‘magical’, and due to the importance individuals placed on these encounters they are the focus of Chapter Eight. The focus here however, is on those who have a lengthy involvement with birds, bats, butterflies or dormice through their monitoring.

Having analysed my own experience of some of the reserve’s wildlife in terms of Haraway’s concept of ‘becoming with’, I interpret it as an experience where in ‘becoming with’ there emerges something that is greater than the sum of the parts. I made the assumption that this would also be the experience of those who spent vastly more time engaging with the animals of the reserve than I did. In my analysis I therefore focused my attention on scrutinising those who spent the most time monitoring the animals, thinking that they ‘should’ be the most likely to experience ‘becoming with’. To this end, I focused on Sid’s monitoring of bats, Dot’s monitoring of dormice, and Ron’s monitoring of birds and butterflies. As mentioned earlier, it became apparent as I analysed my data that ‘becoming with’ as a theoretical framework had limitations in its relevance to the relationships that my informants had with the birds, butterflies, bats and dormice that they engaged with. On reflection and having returned to the

literature, I saw that my informants' engagement with the animals while they were monitoring, appeared to resemble Whitehead's concept of 'becoming' as interpreted by Halewood (2011), Despret (2004) and Ingold (1993) rather than Haraway's (2008) conceptualisation of 'becoming with' although later in the thesis I return to this concept (see Chapters Six and Eight).

## Monitoring Wildlife

In the following section I introduce some of the animals of the reserve through the monitoring activities of Sid, who supervised a bat monitoring programme for four years; Dot who monitored the dormice of Valley Wood for over twenty years; and Ron who monitored the butterflies and birds of the reserve for fifteen years.

To begin to unpack the human–animal relationships involved, I first explore Sid's bat monitoring activities.

Sid is a professional ecologist. His monitoring project was to survey the reserve for Bechstein's and Barbastelle bats. He informed me that he chose the reserve because, 'it's the biggest block of woodland in my catchment area other than the [Forest of Wye], and it's closer to home and it's nice.' The project involved Sid in organising a team of up to twenty, mainly younger, volunteers to monitor the bats over a two-week period. Bats are mostly seen only briefly as fast moving smudges of darkness in the shadows of the trenches and rides after dusk, or heard through the headphones of a bat detector (an electronic device that picks up high frequency sounds transmitted by bats, and lowers them to a sound frequency accessible to the human auditory range). For the most part, the bats of the reserve are a distant object of study: except when they are trapped in nets that the monitors have stretched across the reserve's rides, then the bats are handled to be identified, aged, sexed, and weighed before being released unharmed. Trapping bats gives monitors a rare opportunity to handle and engage with them at close quarters – not harming the bats physically guides the monitors' every action.

Prior to Sid's monitoring, Bechstein's and Barbastelle bats had been recorded

only very rarely in the county, and not at all in the reserve or local area. Sid reflected on the project's success and his pleasure in the project by commenting, 'Yep! It put lots of dots on the map. Definitely'.

During my interview with Sid, he talked of his lifestyle, and it is apparent that such a lifestyle is appropriate for working with bats. He informed me:

I like isolation and being away from the majority of people. Being out and about when most people are in bed. I wouldn't say I was completely nocturnal. . . . I would rather be in woods at night than in a city at night. I wouldn't go as far to say I'm a sociopath but I'm close.

This last comment was made with a smile.

Sid's primary wildlife interest, before he came to his current preoccupation with bats, was birdwatching which is for the most part a daylight occupation. From my data it is apparent that Sid prefers as few people in his environment as possible, although it is not clear whether Sid's nocturnal disposition predates or postdates his engagement with bats. However, regardless of its source, without this desire to venture into the reserve in darkness the development of his relationship with bats would be limited, and could not have developed to the extent that it has. As mentioned earlier, bats are the focus of the monitoring activity and Sid has a passion for them, however, aside from the requirements of surveying their activity, it is also important that he is able to monitor bats in a way that attunes with the values, attitudes and dispositions of his general and specific habitus.

During my fieldwork I took part in a number of bat monitoring exercises, but the exercise I discuss here was memorable because of one bat in particular. The survey took place in the summer of 2010, and involved Sid and a group of volunteers monitoring the reserve over fourteen evenings and nights. During this time a particularly elusive male Bechstein's bat, that carried the tag 282, became a central focus of the monitoring exercise. An ordinary representative of his species at the beginning of our monitoring became something more because he became 'our' Bechstein's bat during the exercise. Bat 282 became, for a short

time, an individual known to us all because of his particular roosting and feeding habits. The constant need for Sid and the other monitors to locate 282, drove them to spend much more time monitoring than originally planned. Even I, as an ethnographic researcher with little interest in bats, found I was so drawn into the search for 282 in consequence I saw dawn light returning to the sky after many long, dark hours before I considered stopping monitoring.

In the planning and design stage of my research I envisaged that the lengthy engagement and contact with the object being monitored – as experienced by social actors such as Sid, Dot, and Ron – would lead to an interaction that could be understood in terms that Haraway portrays as ‘becoming with’. Yet, I discovered in my analysis that such a portrayal of the relationship between my informants and the animals of the reserve would produce a one-dimensional view of their relationship with the reserve’s wildlife. More valuable to my analysis in Haraway’s work was the following comment, which related the interaction to a dance:

The partners do not proceed the meeting; species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject-and-object-shaping dance of encounters (Haraway, 2008 p.4).

This statement follows Whitehead’s philosophical approach to subject–object relationships, in which the phrase ‘dance of encounters’ summarises well the direction of Whitehead’s thoughts on how ‘entities’ emerge from encounters. In addition to drawing us to Whitehead’s philosophical approach, the phrase, also provides a fine descriptive metaphor for the object–monitor relationships of the reserve (a more extensive discussion of the practice of bat monitoring can be found in Chapter Seven).

Bats may be a fast moving shadow in the dark sky, but their presence is often apparent even to the layperson. The lifestyle of the dormouse, however, makes them much more elusive, even to the seasoned observer. During seven years of involvement in practical conservation activities, I encountered dormice on only two occasions, once when the work party I was with found a nest with a sleeping occupant, and again when observing volunteers monitoring dormice boxes.

Human–dormouse encounters occur, for the most part, through signs that dormice have been present, rather than by actual sightings. Hazelnuts, an important source of nutrition, are opened in a way that is particular to dormice. This is the usual way of identifying their presence in woodland, and is probably the closest contact most staff and volunteers will have with them. An encounter with a dormouse is a very rare event for anyone other than those involved in monitoring them.

Dot is a long-term volunteer for The Trust, and her focus for many years has been on monitoring dormice. Her involvement with Valley Wood began with botanical monitoring. Her interest in dormice was stimulated by one occasion while monitoring wildflowers with her husband in December 1992, when the couple almost stood on the winter nest of a dormouse. She explains, ‘It was amongst the brambles – and we saw this lovely round ball and we said that can only be a dormouse nest and that sparked an interest’. Shortly afterwards one hundred second-hand dormouse nest boxes were acquired and set out in the wood. Dot, and five others, would then visit each box once a month from May to October to check for dormice or traces of their presence. Checking whether the boxes were occupied was a lengthy exercise, and Dot said that, ‘Five of us used to go out for the whole day and we would amble round the wood. We also learned a lot about an awful lot of other things.’ Dot showed remarkable persistence in her monitoring of dormice, and completed twenty years of monitoring, before she passed the task on to others. Her persistence is even more remarkable as she said that: ‘You may not find any. You may not see a dormouse all year.’ What then caused Dot to persist for so long in monitoring the dormice of Valley Wood if it was not the direct presence of dormice?

In the quote above, Dot indicates the importance of social interaction with like-minded others that occurs during the task of monitoring. Dot is explaining more than what it is like to be a dormice monitor, she is describing the importance of being in the reserve and how as she ‘ambles’ around she learns about a lot of things. George and Kate also have terms for the way they move through the woods, George calls it ‘mooching’ while Kate refers to it as ‘pottering’. These

slow modes of progress become a dance of encounters in the course of which much is learned about the lives of the nonhuman inhabitants of the reserve. Mabey (1977) identifies such a quest for knowledge, as the primary driving force of the naturalist, in his introduction to Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne* where he emphasises that the acquisition of knowledge was the naturalist's supreme goal.

Dot has been involved in monitoring dormice for twenty years, and in the process has spent an inordinate amount of time, ambling with others, as she describes it, around the reserve. This social dimension of monitoring is important, and although Sid values solitude he also, from my experience of being part of the monitoring team, values the social interaction involved in monitoring. Many of my other informants also value solitude. However, they all comment in interviews about, and thus demonstrate the importance of, social interaction with like-minded others as they take part in practical conservation activities.

Ron is a long-time volunteer who engages with the reserve and its wildlife in his own unique way. He has been a part of the volunteer team for many years and participates in everyday woodland management practices with regularity and enthusiasm. As he works, he observes and discusses the wildlife around him and argues for the unquestionable need for conservation. However, he conducts most of his wildlife observations and monitoring alone. He will also desert the work party to conduct butterfly and bird monitoring to which he is highly committed. He first undertook bird and butterfly monitoring as a volunteer when he retired from work as a physicist in the nuclear industry in the late 1990s. Over the years he has taken part in a number of national and local butterfly and bird monitoring schemes, and takes great pride in the accuracy of the reports that he lodges with national and local wildlife recording bodies.

Ron is an avowed conservationist, and perceives the reserve's rides as special sites of conservation. He considers that the:

Trenches give the best opportunity for wildlife as inside woodland wildlife isn't particularly numerous. The woodland edge is the best

place for encouraging a diverse and numerous amount of wildlife . . . where the woodland gives way to a bit of shrub layer and then some tall herbs and then maybe some short herbs that would be the perfect woodland edge.

The trenches for Ron are not the realm of ‘outlaws’ or the past, as they were for Ted, but are potentially the perfect conservation site for wildlife. The aesthetic beauty of butterflies does not escape Ron:

it’s great to see the silver-washed fritillaries out. I love to see them floating, they’re a lovely sort of floating creature. I love to see them . . . and if I can also see some white admiral butterflies that’s terrific.

In the next phrase he then qualified, the relevance of butterflies in terms of a scientific database, ‘they are getting pretty scarce, they are Red Data Listed.’ Being Red Data Listed is a way of defining a species population as being under threat, and through this comment Ron returns to his conservation perspective on wildlife. Later, in the same conversation, he turns to his interest in birds and what he finds of interest beyond the compilation of records:

I mean there is beauty in birds [like butterflies] but birds are slightly different. I think a lot of us find birds interesting from the point of view of the way they have evolved in specialist sorts of a way. The long thin beaks of the avocet and great long beaks of the oystercatcher and the way they behave and fly. I think everyone who is keen on birds will regard [evolutionary characteristics] as something that is appealing.

That Ron places great value on scientific rationality is apparent in the way he participates in the everyday activities of the reserve, and this distinguishes his actions from the way other social actors participate. I discuss at greater length in Chapter Five, how the staff and volunteer’s values, attitudes and dispositions relate to their participation in the everyday life of the reserve. Individuals’ continuing presence is dependent on sharing common values, attitudes, and dispositions. They often summarise this outlook in terms of being amongst ‘like-minded others’. A central feature of the everyday life of the reserve is an acceptance of others’ values, attitudes and dispositions, as long as they have the



well-being of the reserve as their motivation.

## Conclusion

I have contextualised the setting in which the everyday life of the reserve is played out through the way the staff and volunteers perceived its woodland and wildlife. I have also introduced Ingold's concept of 'dwelling', and Haraway's of 'becoming with' and addressed how each can assist in unpicking the complex dance of encounters that occurred between the social actors and the nonhuman inhabitants of the reserve. I have shown how differently my informants 'think' about the reserve's woodland and wildlife, and the complexity of what has yet to be unpicked if the entangled 'mess' of their dancing relationships is to be understood.

My research design anticipated that Ingold's concept of 'dwelling' would aid the analysis of the social agents' relationships with the woodland of the reserve. Ingold proposes in his concept of 'dwelling' that the history of human and nonhuman interaction is sedimented in the landscape. This has been borne out in the case of Ted and Simon who, in their perception of the reserve, relate to the sedimented history of the woodland. Conceptualising dwelling as a process of making and being made, offers a way of unpacking dynamic reciprocal relationships that staff and volunteers have with the woodland, and demonstrates that the woodland–animal landscape of the reserve is more than a stage on which the social life of the reserve unfolds.

In this chapter I have also engaged with Haraway's concept of 'becoming with'. Haraway's conceptualising of the complex nature of social–natural world interaction as 'entangled' and as 'dancing encounters' are valuable in framing the complexity of the staff and volunteers' relationship with the reserve. I initially considered that my informants' engagement with bats, dormice, birds and butterflies that were the subjects of their surveying and monitoring could be conceptualised as 'becoming with' – in the way that Haraway explained 'becoming with' her dog, Cayenne. However, during analysis of my data it became apparent that I had initially over-emphasised the importance of the object – the bats, dormice, birds and butterflies being monitored – in the

relationship that my informants had with the woodland and wildlife reserve. It soon became apparent that my informants were being-in-the-world of the woodland taskscape, and not specifically with the plants and animals involved.

Ingold and Haraway's concepts are similar in the ways in which they emphasise the reciprocal nature of relationships. However, Ingold's concept of 'dwelling' has a better 'fit' with the relationship between staff and volunteers' engagement with the woodland environment and its inhabitants, whereas if the emphasis of the relationship was between animals and humans, Haraway's 'becoming with' would be more useful as a way of understanding this interaction.

I have shown Ingold's concepts of 'dwelling' and 'becoming with' to be a useful way of understanding the relationships that staff and volunteers have with the woodland and the wildlife of the reserve. It has also emerged that although Haraway's concept of 'becoming with' was useful, it was less useful in explaining the woodland and wildlife encounters of the staff and volunteers than was Ingold's conceptualisation of 'becoming with'. Haraway undoubtedly provides appropriate language to draw attention to those encounters, which may not be wholly obvious and apparent. Perceiving staff and volunteers' relationships with the reserve as 'tangled' rather than complicated, and the events as 'dancing encounters' rather than surveying and monitoring, is valuable in promoting a thorough understanding of human-nonhuman interaction.

## Chapter Five

### The Staff and Volunteers



Figure 5.1: Ted and the Thursday Volunteers

To manage Horwood as a nature reserve requires considerable effort on the part of the Wildlife Trust that administers the reserve, its staff and its volunteers. A visitor to the reserve may encounter individual staff members and volunteers, but these individuals are more likely to be found as part of a work party clearing rides of fallen trees, repairing paths, steps, fences and gates, and coppicing areas of woodland; or in a team surveying and monitoring the reserve's plants and animals. Maintaining the woodland, including the surveying and monitoring of its wildlife, takes up most of the staff and volunteers' time and efforts.

Visitors who encounter a conservation work party will observe that it is comprised of mostly older men, and only one or two women or younger individuals. However, if they then encounter a team surveying and monitoring the plants and animals of the reserve, they will observe equal numbers of older men and women, but no younger participants, unless they visit at dusk or after dark, when they will observe teams mostly consisting of younger people involved in the task of surveying and monitoring bats.

If interested in wildlife and conservation our hypothetical visitors may have some understanding of who these people are, what they are doing, and why they are doing it, although those who are not familiar with wildlife and nature reserves may have questions about what is going on. They may go on to speculate what compensation there is for working in ankle deep mud in the cold and wet of winter, being bitten by insects in summer, and generally getting scratched and stabbed by thorny plants at any time of the year.

From their initial observations of these work parties and teams, our visitors will have made some observations that begin to distinguish each group as separate entities that differ according to the activities involved, and the age and gender of the participants. In this chapter my analysis will expand on these hypothetical visitors' initial observations; to explore the similarities and differences between work parties and teams in order to shed some light on what drives individuals to participate.

My research focuses on one work party of staff and volunteers, and two teams of surveying and monitoring volunteers:

- The Thursday Volunteer Work Party – who carry out much of the practical woodland maintenance and management
- The Wildlife Surveying and Monitoring Volunteers
- The Bat Surveying and Monitoring Volunteers

Analysis of my data confirms that these initial observations of visitors are correct. However, my data also demonstrates that many factors are related to participation, and that a participant's life trajectory plays a considerable part in which activities they volunteer for.

I argue in this chapter that the practical engagement of staff and volunteers with the reserve can be understood using the concept of 'dwelling' (Ingold, 1993). Based on this concept I understand people's participation in the everyday life of the reserve to be a bodily expression of their commitment to it, and the meaning that the reserve woodland and wildlife has for them. To address this relationship between action and meaning I rely extensively on Bourdieu's (1977; 1990)

concept of habitus.

Habitus is a complex concept that Desmond (2007 p.12) summarises in a way that highlights its relevance to my research. He proposes that habitus is:

the presence of social and organizational structures in individuals' bodies in the form of durable and generative dispositions that guide their thoughts and behaviors. As embodied history, as internalized and forgotten socialization, one's habitus *is the source of one's practical sense*.

The habitus as a source of practical sense is relevant to understanding the everyday life of the reserve, as the reserve is a realm of practical action.

The potential for habitus to change and develop over the life-course is used as a route to understand informants' involvement, and to explore the relationship between habitus and practical involvement in the reserve. The conceptualisation of stages of habitus offered by Bourdieu (1977), Desmond (2007) and Wacquant (2004; 2005; 2014a; 2014b; 2015) is introduced as an analytical tool. These authors have theorised that habitus develops from general to the specific. For instance, Wacquant (2014a) comments on the possibility of tertiary, quaternary, quinary [sic], etc. stages of habitus, and I will discuss these in relation to the older volunteers later in this chapter. In recognising general and specific forms of habitus, these authors propose that habitus evolves as social actors encounter and experience domestic, educational and employment fields, and acquire dispositions that are appropriate towards engaging in such fields. They identify a general habitus with values, attitudes and dispositions that are acquired often imperceptibly in early childhood within the family, and argue that these may be present throughout life. The dispositions of a secondary habitus are acquired when social actors encounter other fields, such as the academic and/or employment field. By scrutinising the life trajectories of my informants through the cultural fields that they encounter during their progress through life, I identify how the experiences of such fields are reflected in their habitus, and relate to their involvement in the everyday activities of the reserve.

Staff and volunteers participate in the everyday life of the reserve in many

different ways. Each has a unique relationship with the reserve; however, in these relationships patterns of involvement are discernible. The most apparent of these patterns involves informants having: a thirst for knowledge, a desire to be in the outdoors and an interest in the nonhuman world. To aid my analysis of these patterns of involvement, I first define the participants as staff or volunteers and make a distinction, within the volunteer group, between those who are involved in practical conservation activities, wildlife monitoring in general, and those who specifically volunteer to monitor bats. The justification for these categories is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

In what follows, I first consider the staff, outlining their gender, age, class, education and social background, their life trajectories and the complex relationship between these characteristics and their practical engagement with the reserve. I then use the same format to consider the volunteers.

## The Staff

Three employees ran the reserve on a day-to-day basis. Ted managed the reserve but also had other management roles within the Trust. He was employed by the Trust from 2001 to 2011 as reserve manager. Nick was employed full time as reserve manager from 2011 until the present day. This was his sole role. Paul and Phil were employed on a part-time basis and assisted the reserve's managers in the practical management of the reserve. A fourth staff member of the Trust, Belle was conscripted as an informant as she was actively involved with the reserve through her role as a volunteer coordinator for the organisation with overall responsibility for the Trust's volunteers.

These staff members were all under the age of thirty-five at the time of my study, and all but one were men. Applying the occupational classification of parents to denote class background Ted, Nick, Phil and Paul's families of origin were middle-class while Belle's was working-class. Belle, Ted, and Paul were university graduates. Ted continued in postgraduate education and gained a PhD. Nick continued his education at an agricultural college. Phil was the only staff member who did not enter further or higher education, having left school at the age of sixteen.

## General Habitus

In their early years the staff all lived in semi-rural areas, which gave them easy access to the outdoors and the surrounding countryside. My informants explained that family members, such as parents or grandparents, often had a connection with the countryside and an interest in, if not a passion for, wildlife. Family members were often instrumental in introducing them to the outdoors, countryside and wildlife. This happened in various ways that were usually related to family members' interests and how they pursued their interests. Belle told me of how she was introduced to badger watching by her father:

Lots of childhood memories. Lots of badger watching with my dad. We used to go up into the woods near our house. We'd go in the day after school and put out peanuts and dairy milk chocolate with raisins in it. Find a badger set and put this bait down and then we would go back when it was dark and hide in bushes and watch badgers for hours and hours and hours.

Belle explained that her dad was interested in wildlife in a general way, but that he was not a great naturalist.

Nick also explained that his mother, who grew up on a farm, had a particular interest in birds and wildflowers.

My mother was a fairly keen birdwatcher. She had a real love of the countryside [and country] sporting people. She did bird nesting [as a child] and things like that. She was a great one on wild flowers. When I became interested in wildlife it was easy because we had all the books and I didn't have to buy them. I could just go into the cupboard.

Nick followed his mother's interests, but became more generally interested in wildlife and, like his mother, not only has a love of wildlife but also of field-sports such as hunting and shooting. Engaging as a child with country people and specifically with children of local farming families he was drawn into the activities in which they participated. This has shaped his general habitus and particularly the way he relates to wildlife.

For much of his childhood, Ted lived in a rural area and was guided towards wildlife by his grandmother, rather than his parents:

when I was about seven or eight we moved back down to the West Country and that's basically where I say I am from – it's where I grew up. I don't remember either of them [my parents] being that interested [in wildlife]. They did like the countryside I guess but not in a very sort of considered way – they thought it looked pretty. My mum and dad liked walking but neither was into wildlife, that was down to my grandma . . . the two people I remember introducing me to wildlife were my grandma and grandpa . . . she [grandma] always used to take us out on nature walks. She would set up a treasure hunt for us and she would tell us what . . . [the] trees were and what flowers were and what birds were. She was also into feeding birds so we would just sit and watch the garden birds. So when she died recently my sister did the eulogy and that's one of the things she addressed, her love of nature.

Ted also commented on the influence of school on his wildlife interests, and that of an inspirational teacher, 'when I was at primary school the headmaster was really into wildlife. There was a nature club after school, which I was allowed to do.' Many of my other informants reported being introduced to wildlife through school and teachers who were interested in wildlife.

When interviewed, Paul explained, how he was introduced to the outdoors through the circumstances of his family's life:

My dad's shop was very much in the middle of the village. Our back garden backed out on fields so we were really in the middle of the town but also in the country. I spent all of my teenage years and younger roaming the Shropshire hills. Fishing was one of the things I was very interested in. It was the getting out kind of thing – it's also a bit like a meditation – watching your floats and it's like, you know, that's all you focus on. Yeah it was kind of being out and [its] taking you to nice places. I used to go on fishing holidays with friends and



things like that.

He explains how his bringing of fish home involved his Dad in his fishing expeditions:

[I liked] The going out and catching a couple of Brown Trout and bringing them back to eat. I feel a bit sorry for my old man because we used to bring back all sorts of things . . . and he had to sort of feel obliged to eat them and always did it gracefully. There was certainly that gathering side to it the kind of hunting. It feels so natural I guess.

As I observed Paul during my fieldwork, his disposition to gathering and hunting was apparent in how he sought out fungi. On three occasions I took part in charcoal burns with Paul. This involved us spending the twenty-four hours that a charcoal burn takes, in the woods minding the kiln. For most of my informants, burning charcoal was not an attractive proposition, for Paul however it was. He found great pleasure in being in the woods making charcoal. These long hours in the quiet of the woods minding the kiln could be likened to the long hours on the riverbank, and the making of charcoal became a form of meditation and gathering. Paul seemed most at ease and content when he was immersed in practice in a woodland taskscape.

Phil was the son of a building society manager and, although he spent his early years in the suburbs of a large city, he mostly grew up on the edge of a rural town. When asked about school he said, 'I was crap I got low grades I've got . . . grade four or five in rural science and design and technology and I can't remember what the third one was.' When he talked about the wood he was very animated and said 'I've just loved trees, I've loved trees since I was a little boy.' He remembered a particular tree from when he was a child 'We had this lovely silver birch in the garden ... which we had a swing on and the garden was a wonderful corner plot, L-shaped really big you could easily build another house in it. It had very deep borders of trees and [was] very natural'. I asked Phil about any guidance he had from his parents about trees and wildlife to which he replied 'No it's just within me'.

As children all of the staff had easy access to the outdoors, although what they had accessed varied and ranged from a large back garden to the open countryside of Devon, Gloucestershire, The Forest of Wye and the Shropshire hills. Of the five staff members, three recalled that parents or grandparents had wildlife interests and that these interests were shared with them when they were children. Two informants did not recall their family members having an interest in the outdoors and wildlife, however they all reported having easy access to the outdoors.

Having explored the general habitus formed by the staff members' childhood experiences of the outdoors, countryside and wildlife, I will now move on to consider their fields of education and employment, beyond their domestic environments, to scrutinise the contribution to the specific habitus that these fields make.

## Education, Employment and the Specific Habitus

Having outlined the experiences of the staff in childhood, and the different perspectives of the outdoors, countryside and wildlife to which they were introduced in the previous section. I will now consider the fields of education and employment that they experienced, and how these relate to their practical engagement with the reserve. I have already referred to the way each staff member has a unique relationship with the reserve. However, the form their engagement takes with the reserve is patterned in such a way that it appears to be linked to their family background, class, gender, education, and employment.

To explore these relationships I draw on individual experiences and the patterns of these experiences that emerge from my data. As the concept of general and specific habitus is the framework of this chapter, I endeavour to follow my informants' progression from childhood to maturity. In Bourdieu's concept of habitus general and specific habitus is closely mapped onto specific cultural fields that are experienced during the life-course, however in the lives of my informants their stages of habitus do not map onto cultural fields as closely as the theory proposes. It is therefore extremely difficult, if not impossible, to define the stages of life that can be considered as contributing solely to general

or specific habitus.

Ted and Nick's references to school and wildlife highlight the problem of using the concepts of general and specific habitus. For the convenience of organising my analysis I had taken these concepts to imply that there is a strict demarcation between stages of a person's habitus, however this is not the case in practice. Although general and specific habitus are not clearly demarked in the case of Ted and Nick, I continue to use the idea of stages of habitus, as this is a useful way of relating life trajectories to cultural fields experienced by the social actors of the reserve.

It became apparent that, as I came to understand how the staff undertook their roles in the reserve, their involvement went beyond that of a job that simply provided them with employment and income. All of the staff took a vocational approach to their jobs. Dawson (2005 p.226) suggests that in vocational work the worker experiences 'self-expression, personal uniqueness, and fulfillment'. As this chapter progresses I show how involvement in the everyday life of the reserve offers the scope for staff members to express themselves, to explore their own uniqueness, and to gain personal fulfilment.

Employment roles in the reserve offered staff the opportunity to express themselves through the ways in which they went about their jobs and followed their interests. For example, Ted's life trajectory has taken him into both academic and non-academic fields, and in the process he acquired the values, attitudes and dispositions required to operate in both. In contrast, Nick's life trajectory did not follow an academic path but was immersed in his community without any significant break. When explaining his childhood he commented that, 'A lot of my friends were from a farming background'.

The disposition of Ted's general and specific habitus was apparent in the way he managed the reserve. He took a conservationist, pro-wildlife approach and had little tolerance for those who failed to value the woodland and wildlife as he did – which involved valuing it for its own sake. Ted's approach to the management of the reserve accorded with the Trust's approach towards conservation, and that

of the wider conservation community. For the most part his approach to conservation of the reserve's woodland and wildlife met with the approval of the staff and volunteers but, on occasion, was not understood by those from the local field-sports community. In contrast, Nick brought to his role of reserve manager the dispositions of general and specific habitus that he acquired as he engaged with a particular rural culture, a culture that has specific ways of valuing the countryside and its nonhuman inhabitants. Nick's management approach was much more empathetic to the values and attitudes towards woodland and wildlife shaped by the farming and field-sport communities that he moved in during childhood, adolescence and in further education. His approach was more sympathetic to those in the local community who were involved in these activities than the values of the staff and volunteers. As a result his values and attitudes made him supportive of the prospect of controlling problematic species such as grey squirrels and deer which were damaging the trees, and the biodiversity of the reserve's woodland. Unlike Nick, most staff and volunteers looked less favourably on, or were opposed to, the culling of squirrels and deer.

Belle lived for most of her life in the Forest of Wye and engaged with its woodland cultures. This shaped her habitus and gave her a particular understanding of the woodland – as someone who had lived and played in it since childhood. Woodland appeared to be her natural habitat. Belle's childhood was not, however, guided by a family with a great general knowledge of wildlife although, as we have seen, she was introduced to watching badgers in the woodland that surrounded her childhood home. Belle explains her childhood experience of badgers and woodland:

I grew up in the [Forest of Wye], which is a fairly rural area – always outside. My brother and myself were always outside building dens. Mum would say 'bugger off and don't come back until till lunchtime'. Always surrounded by nature and countryside and I think that is where my love of nature and the countryside started. I was always in it as a child being surrounded by the forest forty square miles of woodland.

In the following quote, Belle continues to speak of her deep attachment to woodland:

I always have had a love for forests I don't think it matters what I do in them really as long as I'm in them. I really base myself around forest landscapes. I connect, I think I value woodland not only as a physical benefit but also as a great mental benefit – if I'm feeling a bit anxious or a bit low or stressed and I go for a walk in the forest. Even if I have a headache and go for a walk in the forest a headache will go away.

Belle demonstrated this in her attitude to the wild boar that now occupy the woodland in which she lives. She recounted an experience of wild boar and her attitude to them: 'There's a lot of bad press about them. Out walking as dusk came down... a boar frightened the life out of me as it came out of a bush. But they're fine.' In this statement Belle demonstrates how she relies on her own understanding of wild boar in woodland, rather than that portrayed by the media. Belle's childhood not only prepared her for her encounter with a wild boar, but also for a career in conservation in which having a woodland habitus gave her considerable advantage.

Woodland has been a theme of Belle's life, and has had a considerable impact on both her general and specific habitus to the extent that she could be characterised as having a woodland habitus. The reader will recall that in my discussion of the concept of habitus in Chapter Two, I noted that when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, to use one of Bourdieu's most used terms, it is like a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]). Belle demonstrates an understanding of woodland and its wildlife that escapes those who lack her life-long experience.

Mostly, it seems that for the staff there is a consistency between general and specific habitus due to their employment histories. For them, engagement with wildlife has conditioned their choice of employment, making the transition from their general to their specific habitus seamless, and making it more difficult to distinguish between the stages of general and specific habitus.

The scope for expressing personal values, attitudes and dispositions of part-time employees is more limited, as their employment role gives them less control over their working day. However, as Paul and Phil went about felling trees, processing timber and delivering loads of firewood to domestic customers, they to some extent were able, to mould their work, in line with their values, attitudes and dispositions.

Working as a tree surgeon Paul was able to engage with the values, attitudes and skills of his general and specific habitus. He is more interested in individual trees than the woodland as a whole and this is demonstrated by the way he acts towards the tree that needs dead, damaged or dangerous branches removed. He first assesses the health of the tree before climbing into the canopy where he will very carefully surgically remove any offending limbs to leave as little scarring as possible. Trees also play their part in drawing him into their world through their relationship with fungi. Paul has developed a particular fascination with this tree–fungi relationship, and is able to enrich the experience of his working day by observing this complex interaction.

Phil's employment offers him the opportunity to use his job as a therapy. Mental health issues have been present in his life since his teenage years, and he finds being in woodland the best antidote to the stresses of everyday life. On entering the woodland's shade he experiences a calmness in himself that he does not find in other outdoor environments. When talking of his job he said:

Well, I get to work in an environment which has seas of bluebells  
just all the natural shapes of the trees – it just mellows me out – there  
are only two places that mellow me out, a wood or a scrapyard.

Their jobs may define the staff's role in the everyday life of the reserve, but how they participate is also defined by their general and specific habitus. In this chapter, as the stories of various life trajectories unfold, the experiences of education and employment and their effect on values, attitudes, and dispositions will become more apparent. However for the staff there is little difference between their general and specific habitus.

Staff members' ways of participating in the everyday life of the reserve can be related to the ways in which they were introduced to the outdoors, countryside, and wildlife as children. They often remain attracted to the landscape and wildlife they experienced in childhood, and find that employment which has connections with either the landscape or the wildlife of their childhood is the most fulfilling.

As the reader will recall, Nick was the child of a middle-class family, who lived in a rural area, did not follow an academic path at school and identified with children from the local farming community. After school he tried several college courses but decided that those were not for him. He commented about his educational path after school:

I then arsed around and went to college to do a leisure management course. I spent very little time there and then onto agricultural college when I realised what I wanted to do, the course was mainly gamekeeping. My mates were all interested in that sort of stuff. I sort of then reverted towards conservation.

After his 'reversion' to his earlier interests he took up employment in the wildlife conservation field. Here Nick was able to develop an interest in wildlife that had been encouraged by his mother and school, but his values remained tempered by his experience of the farming community and his peers. This influences the way that he engages with his role as reserve manager, for although he is a wildlife conservation manager he remains empathetic to the values of the rural field-sports community. Because of this he takes a much more interventionist approach to the management of the wildlife and woodland than many of the staff and volunteers. The habitus that developed, in the context of his experience of the domestic and educational cultural fields, shaped the way in which he approached the management of the reserve.

In contrast, Ted's education took an academic path. He gained a scholarship to a minor public school and progressed through school in classes a year in advance of his age, finally gaining a place at Cambridge at the age of seventeen. However, its academic and social cultures were not to his liking and he left after

a year. Ted's route to a doctorate in geography was via a local agricultural college and at an alternative university. Here he was at home. In his role as reserve manager he was able to engage both his intellectual and practical dispositions. He took a stance on the management of the reserve's woodland that was balanced between his academic understanding of conservation – being aware of the work of scholars such as Haraway, Latour and Leopold amongst others – and the practical skills of conservationists such as the 'woodsman', Dick Wills, who played and worked in woodland as a child, and managed the reserve's woodland for many years prior to Ted's employment.

Ted's specific habitus embodies and hybridises the fields of academia and wildlife conservation. His relations with the reserve and its wildlife are multi-layered and, although heavily influenced by his education in an academic discipline, are tempered by his involvement in practical environmentalism and wildlife conservation. The reserve also holds spiritual meaning for Ted, which he explores through his imagination, music, art, poetry, and bird song. The hedgerow below is an example of Ted's workmanship.



Figure 5.2: A Hedge Laid by Ted and the Volunteers

Thus far in this chapter I have explored the family backgrounds of the staff and how they were introduced to the outdoors, countryside and wildlife. I then



considered how childhood experiences were related to their experiences in education and employment. This offers some explanation for the ways in which the values, attitudes and dispositions of the general and specific habitus were similar. However, it offers little explanation of how these values, attitudes and dispositions are enacted, and leads me to my question, what is the relationship between an informant's biography and their involvement in the reserve's everyday activities?

Whether they perceive it or not the staff's actions in their role as employees are guided by the values, attitudes and dispositions of their habitus. Through their efforts to satisfy their thirst for knowledge, a desire to be in the outdoors and an interest in the nonhuman world, they become bodily immersed in the reserve's woodland setting in a way that could be considered as fulfilling the criteria set out by Ingold (1993) for it to be a form of 'dwelling'. The 'dwelling perspective' Ingold (1993 p.152) proposes:

enable us to move beyond the sterile opposition between the naturalistic view of the landscape as a neutral, external backdrop to human activities, and the culturalistic view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space. I argue that we should adopt, in place of both these views, what I call a 'dwelling perspective', according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves.

Nick not only metaphorically dwells in the reserve but lives in the Lodge which was traditionally the home of Horwood's manager, then known as the 'woodward', before the Trust took over management of the reserve (the source of this information is not referenced as it would identify the research site). Nick re-established the role of living and working in the woodland that disappeared with the last woodward in 1997. While giving Nick the rare opportunity to put into practice the values, attitudes and dispositions of his habitus, taking up the role of a modern woodward, also came with the considerable responsibility of being on call seven days a week.

## The Volunteers: Woodland Management and Ecological Monitoring

As the reader will recall at the beginning of this chapter, questions were raised as to who the workers are, what they are doing and why they are doing it. I then considered these questions in relation to the staff and their participation in the reserve's activities. I now move to address these questions in relation to the volunteers.

The data in this chapter primarily relates to twenty-three volunteers that were interviewed. They were selected for interview from a wider body of volunteers who, as they were present throughout the greater part of my study, participated in the everyday life of the reserve on a regular basis and were active members of the reserve's social network. With the limitation of space in this chapter, it is not possible to refer in detail to the biographical data and the activities of each of the volunteers as it was with the staff. I therefore use the biographies and experiences of particular individuals to illustrate the general patterns that have emerged from my analysis of the research setting.

Involvement in the day-to-day management of the reserve offers volunteers the opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities, if they so wish. The type of activity that is required is however governed by the fact that the woodland of Horwood is a designated nature reserve with the corresponding management regime that results from this designation. Activities fall into two broad areas: woodland management and ecological investigation. Volunteers mainly take part only in one of these areas. Of the twenty-three volunteers, ten took part in practical conservation work, ten in investigating the ecology of the reserve and only three participated in both forms of activity.

The volunteers can be grouped by the activities in which they take part and by how they engage with the Trust's social network. Those who are involved in practical woodland management and general wildlife monitoring are much more closely integrated into the social network of the Trust than the volunteers who only monitor bats. Other than the organiser of the group, bat monitors operate at

the periphery of the Trust's social network and have little interaction with the other volunteers. Although they operate at night and this may distance them from the other volunteers, their instrumental involvement also significantly affects their relationship with the wider social network of the Trust. Only one volunteer participated in practical woodland management, general wildlife monitoring and bat monitoring.

## Who are the Volunteers?

Conservation volunteers were predominantly male, white, and middle-class. Their parents were either middle-class or skilled working-class. Only two women worked on a regular basis as conservation volunteers. All of the conservation volunteers were over fifty years of age and most were over sixty and no longer in employment. With only one exception, all were university educated and/or had acquired professional qualifications. Three had PhDs while only one volunteer was not university educated or the holder of professional qualifications. As a group, the conservation and wildlife monitoring volunteers, share many similarities of ethnicity, class, education, and age although proportionally more women took part in wildlife monitoring. The bat monitors although sharing with the other volunteers many similarities of ethnicity, class, and education differed substantially in age as – except for the team leader Sid, who was older – they were all less than thirty-five years of age. They also differed in that they were all in employment, with five working for environmental consultancy organisations. Unlike the conservation and wildlife monitoring volunteers, the bat monitors became involved in the everyday life of the reserve only during specific bat monitoring projects.

Having outlined the ethnicity, class, gender, education and employment status of the volunteers, and the way they engage on a practical basis as conservation, wildlife and bat monitoring volunteers, I now consider in detail some of the volunteers' biographies in relation to their involvement with the outdoors, countryside, wildlife and the reserve.

## Biography and Habitus

In this section I continue to develop my analysis of the relationship between

biography and practical engagement with wildlife and in the everyday activities of the reserve, using Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Ingold's of 'dwelling'. Earlier in this chapter I characterised the staff in terms of class background, ethnicity, education, and employment. I also expanded on the rural or urban nature of their childhood and how they recalled the way in which they were introduced to the outdoors, the countryside, and wildlife. The volunteers reported having very similar experiences. To reiterate such experiences would be a poor use of the space available in this chapter and would not contribute substantially to my analysis. However, to advance my analysis, I propose to focus on the biographies of individuals that in some way differ from the general biographical patterns of the volunteers.

Being introduced to wildlife in childhood was a common experience of the staff and many of the volunteers. Mary was an exception. She now volunteers to monitor wildlife but was previously employed by the Trust in a range of roles from 1989 until retirement in 2010. Her MA dissertation was on the woodland ecology of the reserve. Of my informants Mary was one of the very few who did not recall being introduced to wildlife as a child. She recalled first being aware of wildlife in early-married life when she moved to live in Australia. When interviewed she explained:

I think . . . when wildlife really hit me was when I was living in Australia from 1969 to 1971 and I thought wow this is different. You see it was the difference and the extraordinary character of it and you know loads of orchids.

Many of my informants reported that they had family members who were interested in the outdoors and wildlife, but Mary reports that her parents' interests had a different focus:

I wasn't that aware of nature when I was a child as my parents were interested in archaeology, history and landscape archaeology. My parents were into other things. I didn't learn anything [about wildlife] from my parents although my mother was a great gardener, which is not dissociated from wildlife – she was into gardens and old houses so I grew up knowing loads about old houses and gardens. I wasn't really interested [in gardens] although I did have fairies at the bottom

of my garden. We always lived in the country. I wasn't into nature as a child. I wasn't into birds, butterflies or anything like that.

Like many, Mary had the experience of having a wildlife mentor but, unlike most staff and volunteers whose mentors were family members, a fellow schoolteacher was her mentor. Mary explained:

I then applied for the post that came up at the Wilderness, the local education field centre . . . and I got the post. I was by then forty-two and that was a full time post. My knowledge at that stage rocketed. I was working with children all of the time but also I had my boss – bless him – he was a fungus expert a mycologist – who was so knowledgeable. He was cantankerous and very difficult, but he was a very knowledgeable guy, I learnt loads from him. I was there for six years. He was a generalist, an ecologist, and a naturalist, and a geologist. He was very knowledgeable and everything else.

Mentors often play an important role in stimulating countryside and wildlife interests, with most informants referring to family members or teachers inspiring their interests in early life. The importance of mentors is not restricted to childhood and can be important later in life. Both Dot and Maud also reported encountering inspirational mentors who had a substantial influence on their interests in the outdoors and wildlife.

Most informants retain interests in countryside and wildlife that were first stimulated in childhood. Tim retained his desire to spend time in the outdoors, but rejected his father's way of engaging with wildlife. Tim joined the volunteers after a career as a navigator in fast jets in the RAF, and in senior posts in financial services. He lived only a few miles from the reserve for many years but had only experienced it as cross-country running route until he became involved as a volunteer. It was then that his interest in wildlife was renewed as he participated in the everyday activities of the reserve.

When interviewed he explained how his father introduced him to the countryside and wildlife of Northumberland, and how different his father's

attitudes to wildlife were from that of the staff and volunteers. He explained ‘I walked miles and miles and miles with dad when I was little.’ He established the difference between the countryside he experienced as a child and what he was now experiencing in the reserve: ‘It was very much moorland that I grew up with . . . not ancient woodland.’ Unlike many of my other informants, he did not appreciate the way that his father engaged with wildlife, although he has retained an interest in the outdoors throughout his life. He recalled that the countryside activities his father introduced him to were all about ‘destroying things whether it was shooting grouse, pigeons or rabbits.’ He was not interested in participating in such activities and he contrasts this with his experience of being involved with the reserve, which, he considers, is about discovery and learning rather than being about destroying things.

During my fieldwork, Tim was only one of many ‘new’ volunteers that I encountered. Most only participated for a short period of time as other demands on their time took priority. However Tim’s involvement with the reserve remained a priority and even after successfully establishing a consultancy business he continued to volunteer. The key to his commitment was finding a way of engaging with the outdoors and wildlife that was to him not distastefully destructive, but more about discovery and learning. Experiencing the outdoors with his father disposed him to the outdoors if not in the form of his father’s activity. For much of his life he cycled and ran outdoors, and often ran through the reserve. However it was only after becoming a volunteer that he came to value the reserve for its wildlife, and as a space that offered him something other than a place through which to run.

Most informants spent their childhood in rural or suburban environments. Dom was the exception. He was the only individual who came from an urban industrial area and from a working-class family with little interest in wildlife. He told me about his family life when interviewed:

I grew up on a council estate in Burnley, Lancashire. My mother was a school caretaker. My dad did lots of jobs, he worked in a foundry as an engineer, which he still does, and he also used to drive lorries. Mum had no interest in outdoors or anything or anything like that she

is scared of flies. My dad was into martial arts and sport and he used to teach martial arts.

However he engaged with the outdoors from a young age:

I used to go walking in the hills with him sometimes. From a kid I was always playing out. I was never indoors I would go out in the morning then I'd come back for my lunch and my mother would call me and I'd come back for my dinner . . . playing sport mainly.

His first recollection of becoming involved with bats was:

When I was seven I did a project on bats and I did a bat walk with the local community group led by a ranger. He was really interested in bats and fascinated by them and that was my introduction to bats.

A common theme in my data is the role of schools and teachers acting as mentors. Dom did not have a schoolteacher to act as a wildlife mentor, although a wildlife ranger did play a small part in stimulating his interest but less so than a book. He explained:

When I was only seven I got a little book on bats it was called *Which Bat?* it's by Bob Stebbins and that was my little bible.

Unlike many of the other volunteers whose interests continued in education and employment, Dom's interest in bats was not reflected in the education or employment path he followed:

When I was twelve I started . . . washing-up for a butchers shop really making sausages and stuff and I did quite well at school but I didn't really enjoy school – I didn't enjoy learning the subjects I did – so when I was 16 I decided I wasn't going to go to college and I ended up getting an apprenticeship as a butcher so I did that and worked as a butcher for a few years – and then I got a job in quality control just in the next town and then I moved to London where I got a job as a technical manager at a large food company and I've been there ever since.

However after moving to London he commented:

I found I needed to be doing something and I don't know why I suddenly thought about bats again and I joined the local [bat] group. I guess that's eleven years ago, I've been constantly at it and I gradually worked my way up to my bat license and then I just got

involved in more projects and did lots of things in the UK. I would go anywhere and do anything to see bats and I gained knowledge and experience when I was training I would travel all over the UK helping people with projects learning about them. I started working with small community groups. I have been running little community projects getting all sorts of people interested in bats and going out and doing fieldwork recording bats and letting people record bats in their garden so that they knew what sort of species they had. I have set up a project in Trinidad working with people based in Trinidad trying to get people involved [with bats] because bats are considered to be vermin in Trinidad. I organised trips for English people and we'd go out and try and catch bat species and try and develop some training for the people in Trinidad. It's been quite successful.

Dom was the only volunteer from an industrial working-class family, and was the only informant who stressed the disinterest of his parents in wildlife. He was one of the most single-minded volunteers in pursuit of his interest in bats, however he showed little interest in other wildlife or the outdoors, or the context in which he pursued bats. Dom was aware of his obsession with bats and, finding the explanation he was giving for his obsession wanting, he exclaimed that: 'Its bats, bats, bats for me'.

In addition to Dom who had an obsession with bats, many of my other informants also had particular passions for various forms of wildlife such as Bert for birds, Ron for butterflies or Kate's for mosses, however, unlike Dom their interests were not exclusively focused on any one category of plants or animals. They took a much wider interest in wildlife and its habitats and some, like George, were interested in learning about almost any form of plant or animal life they encountered.

George's early life differed from the general urban–suburban childhood of most of my informants. He was at the opposing end of the rural–urban spectrum to Dom. His father was a farm worker with a vast practical knowledge of wildlife. As the reader may have already realised, George is an informant central to my



thesis and has a distinctive rural–agricultural habitus. His experience of life has been quite different from most of the other staff and volunteers. He grew up in the very early, post Second World War years in a farming community culture, before working on the land for most of his life, and has remained rooted in the outdoor world.

George embodies a particular ‘rural’ way of engaging with the countryside and wildlife, and informed me that he is interested in ‘anything living’. His father introduced George as a very small child, to the wildlife of the countryside, when his mother, was unable to care for him, because of ill health, George spent many days on the farm with his father, who kept him occupied by sending him to look along field ditches and hedgerows for bird’s nests. George was given only an indication of what and where to look and had to find the nests for himself.

George has not lost the skills he acquired as a child in finding birds’ nests and he still uses them to find nests that are ‘invisible’ to others without such abilities. George finds birds’ nests unaware of the skills he implements. In this, his behaviour conforms to Bourdieu’s concept of the general habitus that skills become embodied to the extent that the social actor is unaware of them.

George has had only limited engagement with fields other than agriculture and woodland. One such encounter with the conservation field is referred to on several occasions in my field notes. George told a story about the rejection of his record of the sighting of a rare bird, a wryneck, that he sent to the County Bird Record Office. No other British bird looks like a wryneck and the possibility of confusing it with any other, even for a novice birdwatcher, is implausible. However the veracity of his sighting was questioned, as it did not adhere to the form of reporting required for a record to be accepted. After this one attempt, George has never again participated in the formalised process of reporting a bird sighting to the County Record Office.

Unlike George, most of the volunteers have been unable to detach themselves from the fields of education and employment and have spent many years negotiating their ways through many specific fields. If Bourdieu’s concept of

specific habitus is to be found in practice, then the consequences of involvement in the employment and educational fields should be apparent in the way volunteers conduct themselves as they participate in the practical activities of the reserve.

Ron and Simon represent the archetypical conservation volunteers. They are both from middle-class families, were university educated, have had professional careers, are over sixty years of age and are retired. They do, however, have attitudes towards wildlife and ways of involving themselves in the everyday life of the reserve that differ greatly, not only from each other but also from many other volunteers.

Ron has a PhD in physics, spent his career in the nuclear power industry and has taken part as a practical conservation volunteer for over ten years. Although passionate about recording the birds and butterflies of the reserve and the county, he rarely involves himself with the activities of the wildlife monitoring volunteers.

When Ron commented during an interview about his mother's interest in birds he began to give us some understanding of his attitudes towards how he thinks wildlife should usefully be engaged with:

My mother liked birds and was quite interested, but never in a serious way. She never went round a patch in a serious way to see how things had changed or put in records. She just liked birds.

Ron also recalled that his interest in wildlife came later in life:

I used to go surfing in south Wales [with a friend] and he was quite interested in wildlife. He said 'there's a peewit' I didn't know what a peewit was [at this time peewits (lapwings) were common birds of farm and moorland in Britain]. My interest wasn't serious and useful from the conservation point of view because I didn't put any records in for birds and butterflies until . . . I was fifty.

Ron values his activities when they instrumentally contribute to wildlife conservation. He contributes by regularly taking part in practical woodland management activities, and by observing wildlife and producing accurate

ecological data for the County Biological Records Office. Ron has been educated and employed in fields of scientific accuracy that are reflected in how he contributes to wildlife conservation. For Ron his activities need to have an instrumental purpose.

Simon is also a long-term volunteer. He began to volunteer on retirement, first coppiced in the winter of 2005/6, and has continued to coppice every winter since. He has occasionally taken part in wildlife monitoring but is not an enthusiast. He studied mathematics to PhD level at Cambridge University and spent his career in the energy industry, initially applying his mathematical skills to technical matters before moving to apply his scientific and management skills to safety matters within the industry. He was introduced to wildlife at school but unlike many of my informants, was not enthused by ladybirds or other wildlife at that stage in his life. He explained:

one becomes aware in the most superficial way at an early age from school when one is expected to count the spots on ladybirds and all that kind of things that kids do. But I didn't become aware of it in any serious sense until after I started to come along to the woods. Yes, you look at things in a very superficial way at school, you look at ladybirds, there was a bit of pond dipping, and a few water boatman and things. That's quite interesting, but there are far more interesting things in life. I was interested in other things . . . you can see birds but it appears to be only a very a superficial relationship without any real understanding and feeling of depth of understanding of what the natural world is like. That's how I was and possibly still am. I'm not an expert in any aspect of wildlife and don't feel I particularly need to be. It's just a nice adjunct.

Having explained that he was not interested in wildlife at school, he then went on to comment on what he is now fascinated by:

The attraction the natural world has . . . is a wider idea. I come here to learn a bit about things, that's true. I'm never going to be as fascinated in butterflies and birds as Ron because I don't actually see the point and it doesn't appeal. I think when you do become expert you become very good at describing at certain levels, but I'm not sure

how much there is underneath that to understand. Nature is a product of millions of years of evolution and it's going to be complicated and I'm much more interested in the laws underlying what produces nature, for example the laws of evolution, than I am in what is actually produced. Interesting and pretty, and beauty that is all it is, the really fundamental thing for me is what produces it.

Regardless of Simon and Ron's different attitudes towards wildlife, they both reflect in their behaviours a specific habitus that connects the academic and scientific fields of education and employment they each experienced. However, Simon's values and attitudes appear not to have differed throughout his life, and give no support to the concept of distinct stages of habitus although it does confirm the endurance of general habitus.

Continuing to focus on differences from general patterns found amongst the volunteers of the reserve, the bat monitors are interesting as they differ from the other volunteers in a number of ways. This difference creates a different perspective to my study. Over a three-year period of surveying and monitoring with Eric's bat group, I interviewed six of the many individuals involved in bat monitoring. In this section I focus on the biographies of Elly, Lily and Bill. I interviewed them during the long periods of inactivity that occur when waiting for bats to emerge from their roosts.

All three grew up in rural or semi-rural areas and had easy access to the countryside. They were all introduced to the outdoors and wildlife in early life, and all reported that their parents played a role in their introduction to wildlife. Elly was introduced to birds by her dad. She commented: 'my Dad is an avid birdwatcher so I was dragged along by him on walks in the countryside.' Jim was interested in biology at school, and in his teenage years a TV programme that referred to Horwood prompted his mother to take him for a walk in the reserve. His university dissertation involved him in a study that focused on woodland trees.

Lily has early memories of first watching birds at home from the dining room

window:

looking out into the back garden and watching the birds. I must have had an ID (identification) book . . . really basic. I was looking at the birds and then I was trying to find the picture that matched – simple – match the bird to the picture and go. Yes that's where it started.

At university Elly studied zoology, Bill biological science and Lily environmental science, and are now employed in the environmental consultancy field. They share an interest in the outdoors and wildlife, but also have an instrumental purpose in their involvement with monitoring the bats of the reserve. Working in environmental consultancy involves employees producing environment impact assessments that must be conducted prior to planning permission for development applications. To carry out environmental impact surveying requires the surveyor to have a handling licence for the species they are required to monitor. Working with Sid, who is a voluntary trainer, can be a part of the process of obtaining a licence, which is needed if bats might be disturbed during the assessment process. Although involved to some extent for instrumental purposes, they all have a more general interest in the well-being of the countryside and wildlife than their jobs require them to have. Elly explained:

looking at the bats and helping them. I'm quite interested in the dormice. I wouldn't say I am specifically attracted to bats, I like mammals and ecology and wildlife in general . . . I kind of like things that you can see up close, I'm more a sort of touchy-feely person. I'm not into birds, perhaps because you have to observe them from a distance. My main interest has always been animals rather than in ecology in general, which is why I did zoology rather than ecology when I was at uni. I didn't get interested in plants until I left uni. I would say it's mostly mammals but I'm also interested in reptiles and amphibians. I've always been interested in animal welfare and that usually means mammals – I wanted to be a vet when I was younger.

Bill's mother was interested in birds and passed on some of this to him although

he only recalls developing a real interest in ecology when he was at university. He also commented about his feelings for trees and woodland:

I have quite an affinity with woodland and I can just spend time in woodland without doing – anything specific. I've always had an interest in woodland. At my current company they have an arboricultural wing . . . they offer arboricultural surveys. I have this interest in woodland and it ties in quite nicely with that. My future possibly lies in that rather than in ecology.

After university Lily worked in a county environmental centre for nine months, where she gained valuable knowledge of ecological fieldwork. She then took a job, as an environmental coordinator, with a company who are the managing agents for a highway authority in the South West. A job she enjoys:

The verges are largely untouched apart from the litter and you see all sorts of stuff out there. The place is full of reptiles, great crested newts and . . . the botany in some places is very good. I don't just do ecology I also dabble in noise assessments, geology, contamination and waste, and cultural heritage and a little bit of air quality.

She also particularly enjoys the social side of bat monitoring and referred to an occasion when the bat monitors had a picnic.

We were here not in a massive group, [Elly] and [Sid] were here and [Mike] and his wife and three children . . . and [Sid's] friend [Nigel] was here who we hadn't seen for ages and it was just like without sounding corny, like a family outing, but with a family that you actually enjoy spending time with. I enjoy spending time with my own family but I know a lot of people don't.

I loved how [Mike's] children are just so interested as both of their parents are ecologists so I suppose it maybe comes with the territory – but you can start telling them about the plants and stuff and they are genuinely interested – whereas I'm an assistant leader with a Rainbows group in my village and we did pond dipping with them a couple of months ago now – and they were kind of interested but I could tell they really didn't care whereas [Mike's] kids they did care

they wanted us to tell them stuff and they were clearly taking it in.

Lily returns us to a recurring theme in my data – the willingness children have to engage with wildlife when they have the opportunity. She also brings out a difference between the younger volunteers and staff, and the older conservation volunteers. The younger staff and volunteers' domestic and public lives are integrated, whereas the older conservation volunteers maintain a physical separation between the two worlds. It is only on rare occasions that the families of older volunteers are physically encountered although they are well known to the other volunteers, as they are often the topic of conversations during practical tasks.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the reader to a small number of employees and a larger number of volunteers who carry out the everyday practical management and monitoring of Horwood Nature Reserve. This model of a few staff members supported by a much larger body of volunteers is replicated by the Trust to maintain its reserves throughout the county. The model is followed by conservation organisations that manage nature reserves throughout Britain (Allen, 1976).

From my data I established that the staff and volunteers are all white, and most of the volunteers are over sixty-five years of age. I also established that younger individuals observed amongst daytime work parties are likely to be employees, whereas younger individuals encountered during bat monitoring are more likely to be volunteers. My data further confirms that, in general, staff and volunteers are from working or middle-class family backgrounds, have been or are now involved in professional occupations, and are regarded in social research circles as middle-class. It also emerges that most staff and volunteers experienced childhood in rural or small town or village settings with easy access to the countryside. My data also shows that being university educated or having professional qualifications is the norm, although one volunteer was largely self-taught.

I have also established that the everyday practical activities of these parties,

when scrutinised, appear to be focused on two areas of activity: the practical management of the reserve, and inquiry into its ecology. It is also apparent from the regularity of participation in activities that the staff and volunteers demonstrate a preference for the activities they take part in. The staff because of their roles as employees must take part in both sorts of activity, although by their actions they still demonstrate a preference for particular activities. Only a small number of volunteers take part in both practical conservation work and ecological monitoring.

These generalisations offered some useful insights into who the staff and volunteers are and what they do, but provided little explanation of their commitment to the reserve as staff members who are relatively poorly remunerated, or as volunteers who receive no financial remuneration for their considerable efforts. Analysis of informants' biographies using Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Ingold's of dwelling aided understanding of the many non-financial compensations for their efforts that the staff and volunteers receive. In particular they have the opportunity to take part in activities that immerse them in the outdoors in a woodland landscape populated with 'things' that fascinate them.

As they go about clearing rides, coppicing, and monitoring wildlife the staff and volunteers engage in activities which bring them into physical contact with the landscape and wildlife of the reserve, in ways that are unique to each individual. These unique encounters and the relationships that are developed between the staff and volunteers with the landscape and wildlife of the reserve will be further explored in the following chapters.



## Chapter Six

### Coppicing: Middle-class Professionals Engaging in a Woodland Craft



Figure 6.1: Coppicers Taking a Break

In this chapter, I explore how a group of predominantly middle-class men and women become immersed in the reserve's woodland through the skilled, physical labour of coppicing. I explore the interplay of class, gender, embodiment and sensory experience that shapes their engagement with the reserve; explaining the nature of this engagement in terms of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), dwelling (Ingold 1986; 1988; 1993; 2000; 2005; 2008a) and 'becoming with' (Despret, 2004; Haraway, 1991; 2008). In order to do this I introduce the reader to the practice of coppicing and how, through absorbing the skills of coppicing, coppicers become immersed in the historic coppiced landscape of the reserve. I show that for some of my informants, their experience of being in the woodland world of the reserve can be understood as a form of 'dwelling', where they are not 'doing to' but 'moving with' the reserve's woodland. They are involved in a reciprocal process of both transforming the woodland and the woodland transforming them. In Ingold's (1993 p.164 *italics in the original*) words:

In dwelling in the world, we do not act *upon* it, or do things *to* it; rather we move along with it. Our actions do not transform the world, they are part and parcel of the world's transforming itself.

In what follows, I rely extensively on short pieces the coppicers wrote for me about their experience of coppicing, and what being involved in coppicing meant to them. These pieces, as will be seen, are well-written and are very effective in conveying the experiences of woodland and wildlife that emerge from social actors' involvement in the practice of coppicing. The quality of their contributions is notable: both in the way language is used and how they are able to express themselves through the written word.

To order this chapter and guide my analysis, I follow coppicers through a typical day's coppicing: from the beginning of the day, when the staff and volunteers first meet; during their walk to the coppice coupe; as they work in the coupe; till the end of the day, tired and fulfilled, they head for home.

## Catch-Up Time

During the coppicing season most days follow a similar pattern. By 8:30 a.m., the first of the volunteers will have negotiated, occasionally on foot but mostly by car, 300 yards of a heavily pot-holed and muddy track to reach the car park at the Lodge. The Lodge and its surrounding 'farm' buildings are the focus of the reserve's activities. Most of those taking part in the day's activity have arrived by just after 9 a.m. When they first arrive the coppicers greet each other, and exchange any news and gossip they wish to share. Tim wrote that:

The day usually starts with general banter and catch up as the volunteer team arrive in dribs and drabs – 'afternoon, alarm clock not working today' etc. being pretty typical but always good to meet up again and find out what's been going on since we last met each other.

Kate indicated the importance of these early encounters when she wrote: 'George always arrives early, and Simon if he is coming, so I try to get here a bit earlier to have a chat.' Having a chat and exchanging 'news' before starting work is an important part of the working day for the coppicers. The 'news'

usually begins with reports of their own and their families' health and well-being before it progresses to the interests they have in the world about them.

In these early exchanges wildlife news is a hot topic. For example, George and Ron often make trips to see less common species of birds and butterflies. When they see a species they have never seen before it is referred to as a life 'tick'; this is usually at the top of their list as something to report to the other coppicers. Ron, early in the coppicing season, will also usually report on his butterfly count from his surveying. For these he walks a set route (at various sites in the county throughout the summer and early autumn) as part of a nationally organised butterfly survey. He is always pleased when he can report good numbers of butterflies, particularly the chalkhill blue as this indicates a good breeding year.

As the coppicers share and catch up with wildlife news the competitiveness and gendered nature of the coppicing culture emerges. Seeing and reporting the first brimstone butterfly, hearing the song of the first chiffchaff or cuckoo of spring, or seeing the first swallow of summer contributes, for some coppicers, to their cultural capital and, hence, status. Competitive observation of birds is central to a particular form of birdwatching activity that is colloquially known as 'twitching' or 'listing' and is almost exclusively the domain of men (Scott *et al.*, 1999). The coppicers may frown on the blatant competitive list making of twitchers but competitiveness is embedded in the reserve's culture. Announcing that you have heard the first chiffchaff of spring or the now increasingly rare cuckoo may be motivated by a desire to be the first in the race. The unspoken rules of the reserve's game are that, while blatant competitiveness is best avoided, competitiveness is acceptable if it is overlaid with a veneer of lay or scientific enquiry. A report of the first cuckoo will therefore also have references to the date of arrival, distribution and status of cuckoos in past years or to current scientific research on winter migration patterns. This form of competitiveness points not only to the gendered culture of the reserve but also to the way cultural capital is deployed to enhance status.

George always has a lot of wildlife news to share which is always welcomed by

the others and, as will become clear during the course of this chapter, he occupies a particular place amongst the coppicers as he spends a great deal of time in the reserve and embodies (masculine) woodland skills. The reserve has been an important part of George's life for the last ten years. He has been both a Trust employee and volunteer. He is now neither volunteer nor employee but a hybrid 'sage of the woods' respected by all for his knowledge of the reserve and its wildlife. George is a retired farm and woodland worker who is held in high esteem by the other coppicers despite his having comparatively more limited cultural and economic capital. His high status amongst the coppicers can, however, be attributed to the field-specific cultural capital that is associated with an embodied knowledge of woodland and wildlife; resulting from a lifetime of physically engaging in farm and woodland work and observing the countryside. This cultural capital is transformed into highly valued symbolic capital which takes the form of his being seen as a naturalist and 'countryman' of the old school. He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the countryside and understanding of the woodland. In recognising his 'countryman' status his fellow coppicers are acknowledging how George's habitus engages him with woodland and its wildlife in a way that is very different to their own. As they coppice alongside him they are able to observe and appreciate this engagement which is unfamiliar to them due to their professional lives outside of the reserve's woodland.

## Mud

As the group catch up on the week's events a member of staff, usually the reserve manager, will join the volunteers and lead the day's activity. Before the tasks for the day begin, a discussion of the merits of what is proposed takes place: decisions are made about the tools required and, particularly, the footwear and workwear needed for the muddy conditions that will be encountered. Tim wrote: 'Eventually, and once the daily meeting rituals are over we all collect our preferred tools and set off for the designated work area.' The coppicers walk to the work site, set up a camp for tea and lunch breaks and, on most days in recent years, George lights a bonfire.

During my fieldwork most of the coppicing occurred near the coppicers'

morning meeting place. However, every winter some coppicing took place some distance from the meeting point and required a thirty-minute walk through the reserve. As the coppicers set off in twos and threes, conversations ranged through topics as diverse as football, politics, family matters, wildlife conservation and the plants and animals of the reserve. These conversations, however, do not insulate the coppicers from the materiality of the woodland. Many of the paths and trenches in the woods because of their underlying geology and the overlaying clay soil are impassable in winter for other than the most intrepid visitor, and even in midsummer remain damp and muddy, if not wet and 'boggy'. The coppicers' bodies, as they contend with the muddy ground underfoot, which makes walking difficult, also hear and listen to bird song and observe the wild flowers, berries and fungi that they encounter. Through the regular experiences of walking on wet muddy ground, listening to birdsong and observing the wildlife, the coppicers came to embody the woodland's materiality. Novice coppicers, for instance, may misread the mud and plunge ankle deep, lose a wellington or misidentify a plant or bird whereas the seasoned coppicer 'knows' the mud, the plants and the birds 'intuitively' and will rarely make such mistakes.

The experienced coppicer is able subconsciously to negotiate the 'best' (driest) ways around where the mud is deepest. In response the paths gradually migrate to less muddy un-walked areas of the trenches and rides. The coppicers are, as Ingold's concept of dwelling proposes, both being affected by the woodland and having an effect on it. How the coppicer's body responds to the mud and the woodland environment is drawn out in the following quote from Ingold (2008b p.214):

When I crouch at the centre of my web, I am all a-quiver, just like the leaf of a tree in the summer breeze. I am sensitive to the slightest movement or vibration. What makes the difference between me and the leaf, however, is that every movement I make is also a movement of my attention. It is the attentiveness of this movement that qualifies it as an instance of action and, by the same token, qualifies me as an agent. To put it another way, the essence of action lies not in aforethought . . . but in the close coupling of bodily movement and

perception.

If the spider is taken as a metaphor for the human animal and the web for woodland then the way the coppicer's body responds to the muddy woodland can be better imagined.

Coppicers' engagement with the woodland about them is analogous to the way that the spider engages with its environment. Like the spider, coppicers are attentive and sensitive to the 'movement and vibrations' of the woodland and, as an instance of action, are attentive not only in perception but through the body. As the coppicers walk to the coppice coupe through the woodland they sense, like the spider, through their bodies, the muddy textures of the terrain, the birdsong, the woodland scent and its movement. Comparable to the way in which O'Connor's (2007) glassblowers 'catch' the heat of the glassblowing environment, the coppicers 'catch' and embody the materiality of the woodland.

After negotiating the wet and muddy terrain the coppicers finally arrive at the coppicing site, where they select an area to deposit lunch bags, tools and equipment. The area is selected not only for its convenience to the work area to be coppiced, but also to provide maximum shelter from the worst of the winter weather. If there is a spot where the sun filters through the woodland canopy and they can sense its warmth that will be the preferred spot.

## The Practice of Coppicing

Coppicing in Britain has a long history with archaeological evidence establishing that it was carried out during Neolithic, Roman and Anglo Saxon periods (Rackham, 2006). The authors of a two-volume history of Horwood Nature Reserve (not referenced here as doing so would identify the reserve) provide a considerable body of documentary evidence that confirms that coppicing has been continually practised in Horwood since the mediaeval period; it has shaped Horwood's landscape over millennia and has created a rich and varied ecological habitat. Fuller and Warren (1993 p.5) explain coppicing and coppiced woodland in the following way:

The basic feature of a coppiced wood is that it is cut periodically and the trees are allowed to regrow from the cut stumps, which are

termed stools. The word coppice is derived from the French ‘couper’, meaning to cut. A coppiced wood provides a self-renewing source of wood allowing an indefinite number of crops of stems to be taken. Coppiced trees can live to a great age. Some of the oldest trees in British woods are coppice stools, which may be more than 1,000 years old. Traditionally a wood contains coppiced trees (underwood) and scattered timber trees (standards).



Figure 6.2: Hazel Coppice Stool Before Being Cut

Cutting of the understory (the layer of shrubs and small trees growing under the canopy of taller trees) and felling of the trees is only the beginning of the process. A great deal of labour is required afterwards to remove the saleable products from the coppice coupe and to dispose of the brash (waste material). This is achieved by stacking it in dead hedges around the perimeter of the coppice coupe or by burning it. The impact of coppicing on the woodland landscape can be judged by how far it is possible to see into the woodland. Before coppicing visibility may extend to only a few metres, whereas after coppicing visibility will extend for many metres or even to the next coppice coupe.



John, a volunteer, writes about the coppice products and their traditional use:

The main trees that are coppiced are hazel, ash and oak, the oak and ash primarily going for firewood and the hazel used for hedge heatherings [long flexible stems used in hedging], stakes, bean sticks, pea sticks and fence posts. The heatherings, stakes, beanpoles and pea sticks are bundled into tens with twine for later sale to the public. Much of the offcuts, of little use for sale to the public, are retained for making charcoal.



Figure 6.3: Bean Poles and Fencing Stakes Loaded for Delivery

In the winter of 1935, up to fifteen rural working people were employed full-time managing the woodland of Horwood (reference withheld as it would identify the research site). When the Wildlife Trust took over the reserve in 1997, virtually all of the traditional commercial coppicing management of the woodland had ceased. However, many of the traditional practices of commercial coppicing are still used today. Under its present designation as a nature reserve, maintaining the oak-ash-hazel woodland landscape and its biological diversity is the primary function of the conservation management policy of the reserve. To fulfil this policy, the Trust elected to continue the traditional practice of coppicing as a way of managing the reserve's woodland. Being labour intensive, the skilled work of coppicing both creates an industrious working human



presence and maintains a way of engaging with woodland that was lost with the economic decline of commercial coppicing. These changes have transformed coppicing from an economic to a wildlife conservation practice and brought into being a specific woodland culture where woodland and wildlife are valued for their ecological richness. In addition, involvement in wildlife conservation practices has also created a dynamic, although gendered, social culture that is highly valued by those who take part in the everyday conservation of the reserve's woodland.

It is late September and the start of the coppicing season and there is a new energy in the daily life of the reserve. From late autumn to late winter, coppicing is the major woodland habitat management activity of the staff and volunteers. As with walking to the coppice coupe, mud and the weather continue to play a central part in the experience of coppicing. Maude wrote how they affect her:

Coppicing takes place during the winter months and the weather can play a part in determining the overall pleasure derived. Often the group has to work in cold, wet conditions frequently on steep slopes up to their ankles in mud. It can be hard work trying to stay upright.

Maude's reference to mud notes a feature of the Horwood's woodland that, as we have already seen, shapes the coppicers' everyday woodland activities. Over millennia the geology and soil conditions have shaped the landscape of the woodland. The 'muddy' conditions shape the coppicers' everyday bodily work in the woods by making walking and working difficult. Mud can be seen as a fundamental element of the coppicers' experience in the way that air is to the experience of skydiving (Anderson & Taylor, 2010) and water to swimmers (Throsby, 2016), scuba divers (Allen-Collinson & Hockey 2010; Merchant, 2011; Straughan, 2012) and surfers (Evers, 2009; Waite, 2008); it similarly affects and shapes the coppicers' experience of being in the reserve. The reader may at this stage wish to remind themselves of the quote in my literature review referring to the relationship between surfers and the waves they ride. The coppicers may not be surfing a wave but they are engaging with a 'muddy' materiality in a bodily way that shapes both the way they coppice and their sensory experience of the reserve's woodland.

Kate, reflecting on coppicing, wrote about the different ways she observed coppicers approaching the task:

Every coppicer has their own approach to coppicing. Some like the challenge of cutting down the largest stems they can find, others will systematically clear an area, one stool at a time. Most coppicers clear what they've cut as they go along – cutting out anything useful (pea sticks, bean sticks and fence posts mainly, also heatherings long flexible stems used in hedging), then cutting what remains into shorter lengths to go on the fire or onto the brash pile. We coppice hazel mainly, but also ash, blackthorn, hawthorn, field maple . . . our worst nightmare is a thick patch of blackthorn.

Kate observes that individuals have preferences for the way they work, and that they are able to work in the way that they find the most rewarding. However, she is also demonstrating her understanding of the coppicing skills that, as an experienced coppicer, she embodies. As Kate's comment about blackthorn shows, not all sensory experiences of woodland materiality are rewarding. Handling the stems, poles and brash of hazel and ash is a pleasure in comparison to blackthorn with its sharp thorns that can penetrate clothes, gloves and boots, and inflict a 'stab' which can often lead to a minor but painful infection. As I worked with the coppicers I observed that some of them would 'take on' the task of cutting and clearing the blackthorn, but others always managed to avoid bodily encounters with it.

Those who did engage with blackthorn often wore protective gloves. The rules of the 'game' however, are not set by the coppicer but by the blackthorn as, regardless of the precautions taken, a thorn will inevitably find its way through protective gloves and inflict a painful wound. I experienced this first hand when coppicing. I dislike wearing gloves to work in, particularly when coppicing, but responding to previous painful stabs from blackthorn I wore, on one occasion, heavy duty gloves and took great care in how I handled the blackthorn stems. Despite this a thorn found its way through a seam in the glove and I received a painful stab; fortunately it did not turn septic. For the skilled coppicer 'blackthorn pain' is embodied and reflected in the cautionary way the body acts

in the presence of blackthorn.

In this section the coppicers' sensory and bodily experience of coppicing has highlighted how the body's response is not consciously mediated, and that skills – such as walking and working in mud – become embodied without conscious awareness.

## **Bodily Skills and Gender**

In this section I explore the acquisition of bodily skills in the context of the masculine culture associated with coppicing, and note how the division of labour and tool use is gendered. The coppicers' acquisition and embodiment of skills has parallels with those engaged in sport and dance in so far as the process is tacit and below consciousness (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2010; Atkinson, 1990; Downey, 2005; Humberstone, 2011; Potter, 2008). More useful comparisons can, however, be drawn with the absorption of bodily skills involved in the craft practices of glassblowing and pot throwing. This is because of the close relation between the body and elements of the material world such as clay, fire and, in the case of the coppicers, wood and mud (Malafleuris, 2008; O'Connor, 2007). In my discussion I pay attention to the tacit skills embodied by the coppicers and the (often gendered) differences between them.

Any visitor who observed the Thursday work party coppicing would see a few large trees being felled, and the entire understory of an area of woodland being cleared by mainly older, white men and only one or two women. They would note the different tasks involved, including a younger man using a chainsaw to fell trees. If they made further visits to the coppice site during the winter they may observe the same people being occupied in the same tasks. They would, however, only after closer study come to appreciate how differently each of these apparently similar individuals were participating in the tasks.

The volunteer coppicers are predominantly older, white, middle-class, retired men; only two women took part on a regular basis during my study and the staff members were the only regular younger participants in attendance. One of the women coppicers, Maude, wrote about how she viewed the coppicers in the

following way:

The majority of the Thursday Volunteer Group are retired gentlemen although some younger members also attend. There are also a few ladies who are as keen as their male counterparts and generally as equal in knowledge. The group changes over time but the core members keep coming to work in the woods over numbers of years. Some people try out volunteer work for the [name] Trust and find it does not suit, however, many stay and continue to attend on a weekly basis. Some of the younger people who join the group are interested in woodland management or any of its offshoots and use the volunteer group as a stepping-stone to other things. They are always welcome and provide a valuable service as they are younger, fitter and definitely much stronger making them better equipped for the more challenging tasks.

Maude's comments on the age, class, and gender of the coppicers confirm my own understanding of who they are. She also offers comments on the different forms of involvement of the long-term, regular coppicers and the younger volunteers that agree with my own findings. The younger volunteers engage in volunteering and coppicing instrumentally to advance their educational and employment potential, and for career development purposes. Such instrumentality, I suggest, is incompatible with a relationship of dwelling involving, as it does, a 'moving along with' rather than a 'doing to'.

It is interesting to note that Maude refers to the men and women coppicers as gentlemen and ladies, rather than men and women, although she does point out that the 'ladies' are as knowledgeable as the 'gentlemen', and makes no comment about any difference in physical prowess. She does however note a difference between the physical strength of the older and younger participants, and that the strength of the younger coppicers is useful. The gendering of roles in the 'polite' culture of the reserve was never a topic of debate. All tasks were ostensibly open to participation regardless of gender or practical skills. George the 'countryman', Ron the nuclear physicist, Maude the retired lab assistant and Kate the ex-computer programmer all used the tools needed for cutting, clearing and finishing the coppice products. Within this predominantly male group of

coppicers, women were acknowledged as equals and this was demonstrated by the absence of sexist language or behaviour.

Despite this, there was a gendered division of labour amongst the coppicers. Felling trees, for example, is a skilled and potentially dangerous practice that usually involves the use of a chainsaw; this sort of work is associated with men and this was clearly evident in the reserve. Using a chainsaw requires the operator to have a licence and, in order to acquire a licence, the operative needs to attend a four or five day training course. This training entails considerable expense, and certification and licences must be renewed every five years. This qualifies them to fell trees up to thirty-eight centimetres in diameter. To fell trees of larger diameter requires further training. Ted and Nick, reserve managers at different times during my fieldwork, both had chainsaw licences, but only one volunteer, Joe, was licensed to use a chainsaw; they were all men. Although the volunteers with a licence did on occasion use chainsaws, tree felling remained the domain of the younger, male staff members. The older male coppicers enjoyed taking note when trees did not fall in the planned direction or, as they fell, became caught up in other trees. They took great satisfaction in repeating these stories to other coppicers to remind themselves that there is more skill involved in tree felling than simple youthful strength, and used these stories as tools of masculine competitiveness.

### Technology and Dwelling

Mechanisation in the form of the chainsaw increases the efficiency of coppicing but distances the coppicers from the pleasure of using hand tools, disturbs the tranquillity of the reserve and, for some, sows the seeds of alienation from the practice of coppicing. Nick's approach produces a very tidy finished area of coppice, but reduces the contact coppicers have with the stools they are working on, and distances them from the hazel and ash and the skills needed to use hand tools.

In conversation with Kate in 2015, I discovered that although she was still involved in wildlife surveying and monitoring she no longer took part in coppicing. She said that a partial explanation of why she no longer coppiced on

a regular basis was that she had preferred Ted's way of working with its emphasis on craft skills and the use of hand tools. It did not destroy the woodland's tranquillity in the way that the increased use of the chainsaw under Nick's management did. This contrast between the use of hand tools, which blend with the woodland's tranquillity, and the chainsaw that disturbs it, throws light on the different ways in which Ted and Nick's relationship with the woodland can be understood in terms of dwelling, and the way dwelling is shaped by habitus (this is explored further in Chapter 8).

I suggest that Nick's habitus disposes him to use a chainsaw and to take a more instrumental approach to coppicing whereas Ted's habitus disposes him towards the use of hand tools and the employment of craft skills. Whilst woodland and wildlife are a vital part of Nick's being-in-the-world and he is a committed conservationist, his adherence to the values of the cultural field of country sports sets him apart from the other coppicers. This emerges as an instrumental relationship with woodland, farmland and wildlife and values them as a resource for human use, which is at odds with their values and Ingold's concept of dwelling. However, I suggest that Nick's bodily engagement with the world can be understood as dwelling, but only at certain moments. He cannot be understood as dwelling more than momentarily, as his instrumental approach precludes this way of being-in-the-world. In contrast, Ted's non-instrumental way of being with the woodland can be conceptualised as dwelling; he is 'part and parcel' of it rather than external to and acting upon it.

To explain further: Nick, because of his use of power tools, can be seen to be acting on the world while Ted, through his use of hand tools, can be seen as moving along with the world. This does not, however, convey the full picture, because when Nick uses a chainsaw he will respond to a tree trunk in the way portrayed by Ingold's (2011 p.56) description of the body's engagement in cutting a plank of wood:

I need more than the saw to cut wood. . . . I need my hands and knees to grip the saw and hold the plank in place. I need every muscle in my body to deliver the force that drives the saw and to maintain my balance as I work, I need my eyes and ears to monitor progress. Even

the plank itself becomes part of the equipment for cutting, in that the evolving groove helps to guide the work. Cutting wood, then, is an effect not of the saw alone but of the entire system of forces and relations set up by the intimate engagement of the saw . . . the workpiece and . . . [the] body.

Nick's muscular engagement with the tree being cut may even be heightened by the skill required in using a chainsaw. In these terms he can be seen to be moving along with the tree he is working on in a not dissimilar way to Ted when using a handsaw. Whether using a hand or chainsaw, they have a similar muscular and bodily engagement with the wood being cut. I would argue that Ted and Nick, through their engagement in cutting trees, acquire a 'muscular consciousness', a term Ingold (1993 p.167) attributes to Bachelard (1964 p.11).

My concern here is with technology but I would suggest there are similarities with Ingold's discussion of walking when he talks of the terrain becoming 'incorporated into . . . [the] embodied capacities of movement, awareness and response' (Ingold, 2011 p.47) of the walker. During their engagement with cutting a tree trunk, branch or coppice stool both Nick and Ted can, through their muscular engagement, be conceived as meeting the criterion of dwelling. However, Nick appears to experience this as a momentary loss of instrumental focus before returning to his normal way of engaging with the world, while for Ted dwelling describes his way-of-being-in-the woodland.

### Gendered Tool Use

As with the chainsaw, the use of hand tools is gendered. Men's gendered embodied skills were apparent in the way they used hand and power tools for coppicing. Middle-class male coppicers may not have the embodied skills of those such as George, but they were not constrained in their approach to using hand tools in the way my women informants were. This is revealed in Kate's story.

On her first day of coppicing Ted offered Kate the job of putting points on the end of hazel hedging stakes. These sharpened stakes can be seen amongst the other coppicing products in Figure 6.3. This task can be compared to sharpening

a wooden pencil 70mm in diameter and 1.5m long. In various conversations with me about the use of hand tools, she explained her surprise at being handed a billhook (a coppicer's axe), a block of wood to cut on and a hazel stake. She was shown how to cut a point on one end of the stake.

Kate's initial reaction to being handed a billhook was that she did not know how to use it, and anyway sharpening spikes on a stake was not women's work. She overcame this response and explained: 'I realised I could do it if I wanted to'; she realised it was only because she had become conditioned to seeing hammers and axes as men's tools that she had hesitated. She became as proficient a coppicer as any of the men although she admitted that she was quite happy for the stronger men, whether old or young, to do the heavier work. Her account reveals the gendering of these tasks even in a culture where no overt distinctions are made between what is expected from women and men coppicers.



Figure 6.4: Nick Coppicing with the Thursday Volunteers

Maude also became a regular coppicer and although she worked hard at acquiring hand tool skills her competence with them remained limited and she was unable to embody the skills of coppicing. She was sixty years old when she was learning to use hand tools, ten years older than Kate, and, like Kate, her earlier experience had led her to associate hand tools with men. Thus age as well as gender is likely to have contributed to making it difficult for her to embody the 'masculine' skills associated with the hand tools used in coppicing. For women and some men coppicers who lack these masculine skills, engaging



in the bodily labour of coppicing requires greater determination and effort.

The gendering of the coppicing field is also evident in volunteers' choices about the activity they engage in. Tim describes how he plans his day's coppicing:

On site . . . now so we'll have a quick brief about the aim for the day and then 'self-selection' really kicks in - which bit looks like a challenge? Who will I work with today? I want to be alone? I want a good workout in my green gym today so lots of cutting and dragging for me! Or maybe fire lighting and fire management is my fancy. All essential elements of the process and the beauty are that you can choose your task, pace and workmates – perfect. Today I want to check out birdsong so I'll work with Ron or Kate – next week, catch up on working holidays or travel so either Cliff or John and maybe another day it's football or forces related matters that seem topical so Dave (an avid Chelsea supporter and ex RN [Royal Navy] man) is who I start with.

Tim's mention of self-selection indicates to him the importance of choice in determining the format of his day. Freedom of action contributes substantially to the satisfaction he gains from his day's coppicing. However his freedom of choice is not impeded as it is for women coppicers by the gendering of the coppicing field as, having spent his working life in the masculine cultural fields of the air force and financial services he feels at home in this outdoor environment engaging in physical activity. Each week he decides on a different work pattern that will lead to the fulfilment he seeks from engaging in a day's coppicing. Tim experiences fulfilment from physically working in an outdoor masculine field, and although Kate and Maude participate in this field, acquiring and embodying the skills of the field is more difficult for them than for the men involved. For Maude in particular, working towards the reward of the skilful use of hand tools is a difficult process.

Having examined how tool use is associated with gender and how different technologies related to being-in-the-world, I now move to consider further coppicers' behaviour in the coppice coupe.

## Knowledge and Coppicing Culture

Once coppicing begins the participants spread out through the work area and either work independently, at some distance from each other, or, for those who prefer to engage in conversation, work on coppice stools which are closer together. During the process of the day, some individuals stray from the job in hand to chat and to 'chew the fat' in ones and twos or in small groups. They also come together more formally as a group when they sit together in a circle for tea, coffee and lunch breaks (see Figures 5.1 and 6.1).

Break time, when the coppicers gather to chat, is an important part of the day. The desire amongst the volunteers to come together to discuss and debate collectively has been maintained despite the change of manager. The pattern of when breaks were taken and the conversations that took place remained the same during my fieldwork. As is to be expected, much of the discourse revolves around topics relating to the reserve, the outdoors, countryside and wildlife; no topic is excluded, and heated conversations often take place around issues of religion, politics and the arts. Breaks are also the time when any conflicting attitudes and values surface. The regular, long-term coppicers have all 'taken in' the rules of how debates are conducted within this cultural field and, while a debate may be heated, it is never disagreeable. Personal criticism, as I observed, of a person with opposing views is recognised as completely unacceptable behaviour, as evidenced by John's comment below when he states that all input is 'valued, right or wrong'. John in his written contribution to my data refers to the importance of knowledge and socialising at break time:

The social interaction plays a large part in keeping the interest of the volunteers. There is always something to be learned and if anyone has a question on any subject there is usually someone who will provide the answer. Some members tend to stay on the fringes of the group during discussions, not many. Perhaps this is because they feel they have nothing to contribute during discussions. They are, of course always welcome and their input valued, right or wrong.

Showing respect to others amongst the coppicers is a central rule of the coppicing culture and, as noted by John, must be maintained at all times.

Although here he talks of it in a context of right or wrong, I would argue that he is indicating an acceptance of the dispositions and values of his fellow coppicers.

Tim also highlighted the importance of break time conversations when he wrote:

Most of us sit around in a group – in a bit of sun if there is some – and chat. Some prefer to go off and sit alone, but usually within hearing distance of the group. Conversation covers financial matters, international politics, current affairs etc. etc. etc. – every week we fix the world and every week it gets undone... what must we sound like but hey, that's part of the deal I think! We find out about new starters and their motivations/interests and we offer support and guidance in whatever ways we can to each other – sometimes expertise and sometimes just a bit of moral support and encouragement if things are a bit tough with work and families. This relaxed camaraderie and the plethora of available information is a real benefit of working as a volunteer.

In this quote, Tim draws attention to the 'relaxed camaraderie' of the coppicers and how they show sensitivity and act empathetically toward others. However, sensory experiences contribute to this woodland camaraderie when sitting in a group under the woodland canopy in shafts of warm sunlight, close to the leafy floor of the woodland and, even for those who sit apart, the tranquilly of the woodland allows them to participate from a distance by listening to the group's conversations. Here I would refer the reader to Figures 5.1 and 6.1.

Maude refers to the breadth of experience amongst the volunteers when she writes:

One can choose to sit next to different people and in this way become part of the group. In the breaks one can sit next to someone smoking a pipe or boiling a kettle for fresh tea and these may be people who travel the world to teach others to fly planes, be an ex-sub-mariner, an engineer or physicist or someone who can recognise birdsong or plants or perhaps have the ability to make beautiful walking canes.

She tells of individuals who have experienced a wide range of educational and

employment fields, and who have varied interests, extensive knowledge and a lively curiosity about the world.

The varying dynamics of the group bring a great deal of knowledge to the team. From nuclear science, mathematics, medicine, social science, aviation, engineering, horticulture, wildlife, botany, entomology as well as woodland management and other skills.

Maude's recognition of the knowledge of her fellow coppicers highlights the role that experience in different cultural fields contributes to the cultural field of the reserve. Knowledge amongst the coppicers is valued; this is demonstrated by the eagerness with which it is shared during the endless debates that take place as they work or during rest breaks. This is possibly to be expected, as most of the staff and volunteers are university or professionally educated or trained. During their lives they have experienced cultural fields that are rich in social and cultural capital. In the world of coppicing, however, social actors who have the appropriate bodily skills have a form of cultural capital which is highly regarded in *this* cultural field; they have a woodland habitus and field-specific cultural capital and are therefore attributed high status by their fellow coppicers.

## Woodland Habitus

Habitus for Webb *et al.* (2002 p.93) involves social actors or communities having 'shared perspectives on the world, relatively common sets of values and shared dispositions to believe and behave in particular ways'. Social actors and a community habitus are shaped by the cultural field from which they emerge, and in return the habitus that is formed shapes the cultural field which gave rise to it. For a social actor to have what I am calling a woodland habitus they must personify the attitudes, values, and dispositions of the reserve's cultural field in their behaviour, the way they act in the woodland environment and their embodied knowledge and skills.

My aim in coining the term woodland habitus is to draw attention to the existence of a specific range of characteristics in the coppicing field that encompass the way woodland and wildlife are valued, and how social actors engage with them. These include the skills and knowledge involved in

conservation practices, and are embodied to the extent that they are an unconscious part of everyday practice. George was the only coppicer to embody a woodland habitus; this was evident in his way of being in the reserve and the woodland skills he embodied.

The basic act of coppicing, cutting to ground level large multi-stemmed shrubs or small trees, may appear to the casual observer to be an uncomplicated manual task. However, to the more acute observer it soon becomes apparent that this is not the case, and that to be an accomplished coppicer is dependent on the coppicer having an embodied knowledge of the woodland and the skills associated with the craft of coppicing. These are not the skills and knowledge gained during professional careers, although many of the coppicers with managerial skills and abilities use them when assessing manual practices of coppicing. For instance, Simon and Cliff utilise analytical and managerial skills gained in the power industry to assess and understand the practicalities of coppicing. Using these transposable skills, they quickly understand what needs to be done and integrate themselves into a world where practical skills and knowledge, rather than academic or managerial abilities, govern the task. Thus, those with a professional habitus have to work consciously at acquiring the skills and knowledge of the experienced coppicer in order to become a respected member of the team. Respect is gained through displaying both social and woodland skills but it is to the likes of George, who dwells and who has a woodland habitus, that respect is most readily given.

## The Bonfire

My reader should now have some understanding of the contribution that class, age, gender and the senses make to the everyday experience of coppicing. My focus now moves to these topics in relation to the bodily labour of lighting a bonfire, and the controlling and managing of the fire that burns the brash.

Disposal of brash constitutes a major part of the coppicing task. When I first began my fieldwork Ted was reserve manager and a bonfire was a relatively rare event and a treat for the coppicers. In my first two winters of observing coppicing in Green Coppice, rather than being burned the brash was stacked in

dry hedges at the boundary of the coupe. In my last season of coppicing five years later, when Nick was manager, the bonfire had become a weekly event.

The increase in the use of a bonfire to dispose of the brash was the result of a major change in the woodland's management policy. The conservation management committee came to accept that if the bonfire was carefully situated, and the size of the fire's footprint kept as small as possible, any potential harmful increase in soil fertility as a result of burning the brash would be acceptable. However, permission to have bonfires was not given without restrictions, and there was a constant tension amongst the coppicers over concern about the bonfire's footprint becoming too large, thereby increasing soil fertility and the potential danger of fire for the woodland's visitors and their dogs.

That the area of English woodland was greatly reduced in the past by forest fires is a misconception that Rackham (2006) challenges in his seminal treatise on English woodland. He clearly makes the point that deciduous woodland in England is only on the most rare occasions dry enough to be consumed by forest fires. This misconception is widely accepted in popular discourse, however the difficulty of disposing of the brash produced by coppicing is rarely appreciated by anyone other than those who have been challenged with the task. The reader will realise how wet the reserve is from my many references to the muddy conditions and will be able to appreciate the contribution the wet, muddy environment makes to the way the coppicers engage with the bonfire.

In this wet, muddy environment burning brash is not a simple manual task of dragging the brash to the bonfire and throwing it on. For the fire to be effective, a woodland habitus is invaluable in order to understand how bonfires burn in different situations and with different materials. For a fire to burn well in the damp, sheltered conditions of the reserve's woodland requires a combination of factors, such as a good wind speed and low moisture content of the brash. However starting a fire when there is no wind or the brash is very wet requires a considerable degree of skill and understanding of both the fire-site and the material to be burnt. George embodied these skills, acquired during a lifetime of

working on the land, consequently he always had the responsibility of lighting the fire. Tim, in a written contribution to my data, explained how he perceived George's task of lighting and managing the bonfire:

Starting a fire and getting the brash burning is one of the most skilled jobs and is usually the responsibility of George a genuine countryman and the longest serving member of the coppicers. Fire lighting is a great challenge and there is etiquette to learn – dry deadwood please and small bits first – do we criss-cross or lay everything in same direction (first timers need to know and this “teaching” could fall to you!). As for on-going management once the fire catches and roars away (assuming of course that it's not a slow starter otherwise merciless banter ensues as it must be your fault!) you need to work hard and methodically to keep everything shipshape and clear around the burn area.

Tim here uses his analytical skills to assess the embodied skills George uses to light the bonfire. He understands that once the fire is roaring away, maintaining it only requires a method to be followed or, as he terms it, an ‘etiquette’ which is a less skilled process. The respect Tim has for George, who he terms a ‘genuine countryman’, is a recognition of the highly skilled work involved in lighting a fire in unfavourable weather conditions. It is important to note that not all of those involved in coppicing understood the difficulty of lighting a fire and the skills involved, and this is especially the case when volunteers are new. Like many of the coppicers when they began coppicing, Tim had little understanding of the level of skill required to manage a bonfire and to coppice effectively. Most novice coppicers rapidly came to understand the basic skills needed, and most eventually became skilled and effective coppicers; none, however, displayed the woodland habitus of George and the bodily skills that are part of it.

Once the bonfire has been lit by George, and is burning well, responsibility for its maintenance moves to other coppicers, usually longer-serving men and women members of the volunteer group, who then have the responsibility of maintaining it and keeping its footprint as small as possible. Maintaining the bonfire is less skilled than lighting it, and requires less physical effort than

cutting the coppice stools and dragging brash to the fire. This means that all of the coppicers regardless of gender, age, skill or physical strength are able to participate. They have discovered that managing the fire is best achieved by cutting the brash into lengths less than two metres long and then laying them parallel, rather than in a random fashion which would cause the fire to resemble an untidy bird's nest. If the fire is not carefully managed in this way there is the constant possibility that its footprint may become too large. This stage of the bonfire demands less understanding of the working of fire, and coppicers who are adept at following the 'recipe' for maintaining the fire take over.

Ron often works at maintaining the bonfire. He gained a PhD in physics and spent his working life in various management roles in the nuclear power industry, a cultural field of rationality and science to which Ron applied himself throughout his working life. That he is disposed towards rational and scientific practices is particularly evident in the precise and accurate field reports he produces of the birds and butterflies he observes. He also demonstrates his appreciation of precision in the way the bonfire is managed. He wrote:

If I'm the one supervising loading up the fire, I find it problematical if people pile lots of brash (waiting to be burned) on top of itself so that it takes further energy to unravel it all before putting it on the fire. I was taught a dozen or so years ago . . . how to lay a fire. The tutor was Mary's husband [she was a Trust employee and he was a rural worker] who advised laying the brash parallel, which I find the best way to avoid the fire dying out in the middle. I think this tends to occur with the . . . tent method or random stacking, where the brash all gets tangled up and don't drop down – but other people have their pet methods too!

Ron's specific habitus is scientific and orderly and has been transposed into the way he engages in practical tasks. The rules that he enforces are mostly unspoken and coppicers are expected to play by the rules. Verbal reprimands are not usually issued, and fire supervisors like Simon, Ron and Kate will simply pull the brash from the bonfire, cut it into the appropriate length and then restack it in parallel on the bonfire.



Laying the brash on the fire in this way also allows for close contact between the brash and the heat from the heart of the fire, and then even wet brash will burn. When the fire is burning well there is always the temptation to over stoke it and to let it to become too large. However, as the more long-serving and experienced men and women volunteers are usually in charge of loading the fire they soon intervene and bring it back under control. Controlling the fire is important, not only in terms of its footprint, but also in terms of safety, and by mid-afternoon the end of the day's coppicing is in sight and another convention of the bonfire is enacted. Brash is no longer added to the fire so that by the time the coppicers leave the coppice site the fire will be in a safe condition to be left. It is the convention of the coppicers not to leave a dangerous fire, but from my observations the dangers may well be overestimated in wet woodland, and have more to do with a general fear of fire than the possibility of the fire spreading. George always supervises and monitors the fire at the end of the day and will on occasion remain to be sure it is safe after the other coppicers have left.

As Tim has explained, individuals are not given roles and most are taken up by whoever wants to do the job. George is the only one whose roles of product quality controller and bonfire lighter are designated; this is a manifestation of his embodied woodland habitus and the symbolic capital associated with it. Moreover, the skills required for this role are gendered as indicated by women's relative absence from manual farm and woodland work, particularly coppicing.

Not all of the coppicers take an interest in the fire; Cliff for instance, showed little interest in it or the skills required in lighting and maintaining it, as his desire is to engage in physical exercise. He was university educated and spent his working life managing the construction and decommissioning of major nuclear power infrastructure projects. He was a regular member of the Thursday work party, but his reasons for participating had more to do with camaraderie and physical exercise than with wildlife conservation. He, like many of the other coppicers, enjoyed the bodily work of coppicing, which contrasted strongly with his sedentary working life. When I interviewed him he explained his perspective on coppicing and the bonfire:

I like working out in the open I like something that is fairly vigorous.

It's nice seeing the woods in all the different times of the year. I like the social side of it. It suits me very well.

He then further explained his attitude to the bonfire:

I'm only interested in as far as putting stuff on. As I say I like physically active work. Not just tending the bonfire but putting stuff on it. If I can be cutting stuff and dragging it to the fire or cutting stuff into logs I'd rather be doing that than messing with the bonfire.

Cliff found that managing the bonfire did not provide the physical activity he needed. Although he was a long-term coppicer, the reserve's woodland and wildlife could be seen as providing a backdrop for his physical exercise as I discussed in my review of the serious leisure literature. He was one of a minority of coppicers who had an interest in the woodland but no great passion for either woodland or its wildlife. Participating in coppicing as a way of engaging in physical exercise could lead us to conclude that Cliff is acting on the woodland rather than dwelling. I would go along with this but suggest that through his bodily engagement with the woodland, week after week, he enters into a reciprocal relationship with it that can be understood in terms of 'becoming with'; he is changed by the woodland in the process of acting upon it.

Simon is similar to Cliff, although unlike Cliff, looking after the bonfire is what he 'likes doing best'. Simon is a coppicer who gained a PhD in mathematics at Oxbridge and has spent his working life in various senior roles behind a desk in the power industry. He was not looking for the sort of physical exercise that Cliff sought nor was he seeking an escape from the desk bound days of working life; instead he was engaging with the reserve's woodland as a continuation of his intellectual curiosity about 'life'. Of all the volunteers Simon is the one who consistently challenges the attitudes and values of society, and particularly the environmental cultural field in which wildlife conservation is situated. He was not specifically interested in coppicing as a way of engaging with wildlife but as a way of being-in-the-world.

As the reader will be aware, Simon makes regular appearances throughout my data chapters, a presence I attribute to his constant questioning of all aspects of

everyday life, both outside and inside the reserve. To fully appreciate his comments the reader should bear in mind that Simon is the master of understatement, and particularly enjoys challenging the intellectual conceit of individuals like myself through his charmingly sardonic replies. In the following extract from my interview with him, he makes a number of interesting points about the reserve and coppicing:

the river is very nice and I like that, but also because I remember I made that gate, and the fact that it feels like I am making a difference here [see Figure 6.5]. I've changed the world for the better and when we come here as a group in the winter we do this fantastic exercise called coppicing. Which has a certain mindlessness to it, which is quite reassuring, you just carry on doing it. I find it's not particularly rewarding. On the other hand they let me look after the bonfire, which is what I like doing best.

In less than a hundred words Simon establishes that looking after the bonfire is what he most likes doing, Simon tells us a great deal about his relationship with the reserve and what his involvement in the everyday life of the reserve means to him. He is portraying how, by taking pleasure in the landscape, seeing a gate that he set in place, and feeling that he has 'changed the world', he is experiencing, through physical bodily work, a way of being-in-the-world that he values for its mindless quality. This is a bodily way of being-in-the-world that is the antithesis of his professional scientific habitus. Further, he reminds us that coppicing has a mindless quality that he finds reassuring. The reassurance that Simon is seeking I refer to in some detail in Chapter Four where it emerged that he is at a stage in his life where he is reflecting on his past, present and future and finds that his involvement with the reserve through coppicing is helpful in this process.

Having coppiced with Simon for five years during my fieldwork, my understanding is that he is complimenting coppicing for being mindless, rather than denigrating it. He has found that the bodily labour of coppicing has immersed him in the woodland world of the reserve in a way that is very different to the way he experienced the world in his professional life, and has introduced him to a way of being-in-the-world that can be construed as

‘becoming with’ the woodland. Informants like Simon and Cliff stand as examples of those who become with the woodland, in contrast with George, who dwells, and most of the other coppicers whose way of being-in-the-woodland can be understood, at times, as dwelling.



Figure 6.5: Simon, and ‘His’ Gate

## Stumble Time: The End of the Day

Tim explains that the coppicing day begins to end for him at ‘stumble time’. This is when he feels physical tiredness overtaking his body, and the experience of the day culminates in a sense of fulfilment. He wrote:

By the time mid-afternoon arrives it’s ‘stumble time’ – fatigue tends to kick in and trips, stumbles, aches and pains arrive – it’s time to call it a day, say ‘see you next week’ and go home for a well-deserved shower, beer, sleep, or whatever. Looking back as you leave is so rewarding – a clear area where there was dark over-grown woodland in the morning – the sunshine streaming in – birds and butterflies flitting about – tidy stacks of cut wood products. A long way from the ‘still full in-tray’ of corporate life and a real sense of a job completed, the nice tiredness of physical exertion, the sense of doing something useful for the natural world. Newly acquired knowledge of birdsong, identifying a new flower, spotting your first

comma butterfly, things that have passed me by in the last 57 years of busy corporate and family life – that’s why I do it.

Tim’s reference to tiredness and physical exertion draws attention to the importance of the physical aspect of coppicing, which is very different to the way many of these professional middle-class coppicers experience the material world outside of the coppice coupe. Aches and pains and a tired body are the physical manifestation of fulfilment (Stebbins, 2007; 2010), and are experienced by the coppicers as a result of being immersed in Horwood’s woodland. I would further argue that this experience of fulfilment is specific to the woodland’s cultural field (Nettleton, 2013) and contingent on being immersed in the field (I explore this further in Chapter Eight).

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have used Ingold’s idea of dwelling to frame my analysis. I have discussed what it is to dwell and questioned who can be considered to be dwelling in the reserve’s woodland. I examined how a group of predominantly middle-class men and women who engage in the traditional woodland management practice of coppicing become immersed in the woodland’s material environment. I argue that the coppicers’ habitus shapes their way of being-in-the-world, and that some of them experience a way of ‘being-in-the-world’ that can be likened to dwelling whereas others’ way of being-in-the-world can be understood better as ‘becoming with’.

Using the concepts of general and specific habitus has enabled me to explain different managerial approaches to coppicing which has, in turn, been useful in demonstrating the importance of habitus in understanding both how coppicers coppice and who dwells. George, for instance, dwells, which is recognised by the coppicers referring to him as a ‘countryman’. He dwells in Ingold’s (1993) terms because he moves along with the woodland by ‘mooching’ (see Chapter Four) and is ‘part and parcel of the world transforming itself’ (ibid. p.163). He acts with the woodland rather than acting upon it. I have argued that those coppicers who are passionate about woodland and wildlife can be seen to move along with the woodland; they transform it through coppicing and at the same

time are themselves transformed. In this way, they become part of the process of the woodland transforming itself. These groups of coppicers, I conclude, are in some way, if only from time to time, dwelling.



Figure 6.6: Heading Home

There is a second group of coppicers whose mode of being-in-the-world is instrumental and cannot be so easily understood as dwelling; they are more easily assigned the role of participant in a serious leisure pursuit (Davidson & Stebbins, 2011; Stebbins, 2007). For participants in serious leisure the environment can be seen as a backdrop for the activity rather than an end in itself. I suggest that this group of coppicers is also in some way ‘becoming with’ the woodland as, although they set out to act on the woodland for personal reward, most typically to experience physical activity in the outdoors, as they become immersed in the woodland they become part and parcel of it and are transformed by it. By being transformed in this way, they begin to move along with the woodland rather than acting upon it. However I would not go so far as to suggest that they dwell in the way that George dwells, and would propose that rather than considering them to dwell it would be more fruitful to consider them as ‘becoming with’. What this chapter shows, therefore, is that there are different ways of being-in-the-woodland that can be understood in terms of dwelling, dwelling ‘fleetingly’ or ‘becoming with’. The coppicers who fit the

two latter cases are those who move beyond a way of being-in-the-world that is primarily instrumental.

Coppicing involves skilled bodily labour but occurs in a cultural field dominated by middle-class attitudes, values and dispositions. Today's coppicers are unlike their predecessors when the woodland was coppiced for economic rather than conservation reasons and are predominantly from the professional middle-class. Most are therefore unused to engaging in manual labour in an outdoor environment and have to acquire the necessary skills. However, not all of the coppicers are unused to physical labour and some, such as George, have the embodied skills and knowledge of those who have worked in outdoor rural environments all their lives. These skills are an unspoken part of his way of being-in-the-world. I conceptualise this as embodying a woodland habitus, which encompasses the embodiment of skill and knowledge involved in coppicing and lighting the fire. He is the only coppicer who has a woodland habitus which, in his case, is associated with dwelling.

George's tacit skills were acquired and can only be acquired through practice. This contrasts with those from a professional background who, by applying their professional skills, try consciously to understand and reproduce the bodily skills of coppicing. However, some volunteers, through immersion in the woodland and the craft of coppicing, come to embody the skills of a coppicer in a process that is tacit and beneath consciousness. Moreover, engaging in coppicing immerses the volunteers in an array of affective, sensory and bodily experiences as diverse as walking through mud and listening to bird song, which, through repetition as they engage in the practice of coppicing, become embodied. Embodying these woodland skills is essential to the process of becoming a coppicer and acquiring a woodland habitus.

Cultural and symbolic capitals in this field are attributed to those who embody the skills associated with physical work in a woodland environment, particularly George. However the middle-class coppicers are able to gain field-specific cultural capital and acquire elements of a woodland habitus through spending time in the outdoors, doing physical work, following a wildlife interest, caring

for the reserve, and taking part in the camaraderie of working with ‘like-minded others’.

The reserve’s cultural field can be seen as a hybrid created by the intersection of the attitudes, values and dispositions of both middle-class coppicers and those from the rural working-class with extensive experience of physical engagement with the material world. I found however that there was not a clash within the field between these different sets of attitudes and values; middle-class coppicers valued the way the ‘countryman’ engaged in coppicing and the ‘countryman’ respected the way the middle-class coppicers valued the reserve’s woodland. The cultural field is unified by a shared way of: valuing the woodland, its wildlife, and the practical coppicing ability of participants, i.e. their embodied skills and knowledge.

The exchange of knowledge about woodland and wildlife was important to the coppicers, and was competitively traded in the masculine culture of the conservation field. However, competitiveness was not all-pervasive; as John tells us there is always something to ‘learn’ and as Tim found it was invaluable being able to ‘work with an expert to catch up on birdsong’. Involvement in coppicing was related to age, physical ability and gender. There were only a small number of women amongst the volunteers and although there was a veneer of gender equality there was a gendered division of labour. This was made apparent by women’s hesitant approach to using hand tools and younger men’s use of the chainsaw in the felling of trees. Being a man is associated with a greater freedom of choice in the use of hand tools, and masculine competitiveness allows older men to engage in banter with the more physically able younger men.

Having explored the bodily work of the staff and volunteers, and how it is shaped by gender, class and age, in the next chapter I explore how volunteers engage with the reserve’s woodland environment through their involvement in the surveying and monitoring of the woodland habitat and its wildlife.



## Chapter Seven

# Surveying, Monitoring and Encounters with Wildlife

The premise of my thesis is that through analysis of the specific practices social actors involve themselves in, it is possible to shed some light on their behaviour in the world. In this chapter I explore how the staff and volunteers contribute to what is known and understood about Horwood's history, geology, biology and ecology through surveying and monitoring, and through the everyday encounters they have with the natural world. An investigation of surveying and monitoring practices is advantageous in that these are bounded events that can be observed as they take place. More problematic are the moment-by-moment encounters that occur as staff and volunteers participate in the everyday life of the reserve, which produce subjective snippets of knowledge that are not formally recorded but contribute substantially to understanding the reserve.

In this chapter I explore a number of scenarios that involve the monitoring of specific wildlife by particular social actors. I then move on to explore everyday observations and the social actors who make them, and to discover what this can tell us about my informants' involvement in the everyday life of the reserve.

### Cultural Context

Social actors who participate in the everyday life of the reserve, regardless of the activities they are involved in, find themselves in a cultural field dominated by the concepts and processes of the environmental and ecological sciences. When introduced to the practical setting of the everyday life of the reserve, these concepts must be academically valid and add value to the practical conservation of the reserve's wildlife. This can be measured in scientific terms but must also withstand the critique emanating from a much older discourse – that of the naturalist – and the affective responses of social actors to the natural world. Both scientists and naturalists can be discerned amongst the volunteers. In this chapter I highlight the many different perspectives volunteer surveyors and monitors have toward the woodland and wildlife, which may vary from time

to time, and with regard to the activity they are engaging with.

To develop my argument, I focus on the volunteers rather than on the tasks of observing, surveying and monitoring. I consider the volunteers in relation to both individual species and wildlife in general and whether volunteers are inclined to appreciate the subjects of their study from a scientific or affective perspective. I conceptualise the volunteers' perspectives as being situated on a continuum where at one extreme the natural world is valued solely from an affective perspective, and at the other extreme solely from a scientific perspective. This creates 'ideal types' that do not in reality exist, but are a useful way of thinking about the different perspectives of my informants. Each volunteer values the natural world from a rationalist or an affective perspective; I label each informant as being either a naturalist with an affective approach to observing wildlife, or as an ecologist with a professional–scientific perspective. These categorisations are once again 'ideal types', however, my informant's positions on these spectrums are fluid and related to the current context of their experiences. It is important to note that even informants I hold as being examples of an 'ideal type', such as George the naturalist, may on some issues take a scientific approach, whereas Ron the scientist may express affective perspectives. It is also important to note that the staff and volunteers, however they are involved in reserve activities, are inveterately curious observers of the world about them.

All of my informants show an interest in observing and developing their knowledge of the reserve's woodland and wildlife, some consider observation to be the most useful and rewarding activity in which they can be involved, while for others practical woodland management activities fill this role. Only a limited number of volunteers take part in both woodland management tasks, such as coppicing, and surveying and monitoring tasks.

Casual observers, surveyors and monitors do not have a unified approach to gathering data; they differ considerably on how best to carry out such activities and have very different attitudes to the value of the data. There emerges a naturalist-ecologist divide on the sort of data that is most valued, which returns

us to how the natural world is perceived and why individuals perceive it as they do.

## The Social Context

The staff and volunteers all engage to some extent with the social network of the reserve and the Trust. Some staff and volunteers rarely encounter other social actors in the network but they share a knowledge of each other that bridges the physical divisions between them. It would be hard to find regular coppicers who are unaware of Dot and her monitoring of dormice in Valley Wood, and it would be unlikely to find a volunteer or even a regular visitor to the wood who is unaware of George and his knowledge of the reserve.

The way that the volunteers participate in the Trust's social network varies considerably. Some, like Mary, Dot, Ron, Jill and Jack, have worked, volunteered and socialised together for many years, and are at the network's core. The exceptions to this general pattern of involvement are the younger bat monitors: the leader of the bat monitors is a long-standing member of the Trust and its social network, however, the majority of the bat monitors are on the periphery of the social network and are unknown to most of the staff and other volunteers. While the volunteers are part of a stable reserve community, the bat monitors are only visitors whose reason for involvement is because they have a particular interest in bats or are engaging in surveying and monitoring to advance their careers. I will now move on to consider volunteers' involvement in the surveying and monitoring of dormice and bats to explore how volunteers engage with and perceive the nonhumans of the reserve.

## Monitoring Dormice

Most people who visit the reserve, including my informants, are more likely to find a hazelnut shell showing dormice teeth marks or come across an empty nest than they are to catch sight of a dormouse. The wider population will never encounter a living dormouse. For most of my informants, other than the dormouse monitors, it is a rare event and even the monitors find that, despite the amount of time they spend monitoring, encountering a dormouse is a rare experience. Rarely encountered, dormice have a 'mystique' that fascinates staff,

volunteers and visitors alike and have a considerable impact on the way the reserve is managed. The well-being of the dormouse population is a major justification for continued management of the woodland through the practice of coppicing. The dormice of the reserve have been protected since 1988 by the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and are listed for protection by both the European Habitats Directive (1992) in Annex IV (a), and Appendix 3 of the Bern Convention (1979). This protection has a substantial impact on how the Trust, my informants and the dormouse monitors act toward the reserve's dormice even when their presence is only suspected.

The ecology of dormice limits human–dormouse encounters. The dormouse population of the reserve, although not fully numerated, is thought to be small. Dormice are predominantly nocturnal, rarely move around or feed in the woodland space that humans occupy and when encountered they are fast moving and agile. In the media dormice are portrayed through physical or behavioural characteristics that humans find attractive; they have relatively large round eyes, a body covered with soft sandy fur and have the habit of sleeping and hibernating in a foetal ball. These characteristics make it easy for the media to anthropomorphise them and, although this is a practice shunned by professional ecologists, it often surfaces when the staff and volunteers encounter animals.

During my fieldwork I observed dormice being encountered by my informants, only twice, once with Jill and Jack when observing them monitoring, and then by accident when coppicing with the Thursday volunteers. For any of my informants, an encounter with a living dormouse is a noteworthy event. Even for those who have the opportunity of encountering dormice through monitoring, encounters with dormice are considered to be a privileged event. While Dot monitored dormice, which involved her spending several days a month checking dormouse boxes, she only rarely encountered an actual dormouse. Dot highlights the rarity of encounters with dormice when she explained in an interview, 'We only saw two or three last year'.

To the staff and volunteers, the monitoring of dormice involves the repeated

collection and analysis of site-specific data relating to them and their activities. In addition, academic ecologists and professional wildlife conservationists will add to their interpretations by adding layers of methodologies and statistical analysis. Conceptually and practically the monitors are seen as objective observers independent of the objects or events under observation (see Latour, 2007). The monitors in my study were rarely reflexive about their involvement in the act of monitoring dormice but were, on occasion, reflexive about how their involvement in monitoring changed their relationship with the reserve's woodland and wildlife. In the following section I explore how dormouse monitoring is experienced by individuals and how the different ways they experience monitoring can be understood in terms of life trajectory, habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and dwelling (Ingold, 1993).

Jill and Jack have monitored the dormice of Horwood for ten years, and Dot the dormice of Valley Wood for over twenty years. During my fieldwork I spent time with Dot, Jill and Jack as they went about their monitoring activities, and when dormice were a general topic of conversation. Dormice were also a topic that arose in my interviews with the volunteer monitors, and on the many other occasions that I met and chatted with them. I spent over three hours of interview time with these informants, as they were a rich source of data that related, not only to dormice, but also to the wildlife and woodland of the reserve.

Because of their dormice monitoring activities, Dot, Jill and Jack are recognised by most of my informants as being part of a local 'dormouse network' that operates within the bounds of the Trust's reserves. They are also a part of a wider national and international network and are guided by the practices of that network. This network can be seen as part of a Bourdieuan 'field' that governs the criteria that control human encounters with dormice. The rules for engaging in the monitoring of dormice are created by a national and European network composed of national and European recognised dormouse 'experts', Natural England, and other European government and non-government policymaking and regulating organisations. All the encounters with dormice I observed or experienced appeared to be dominated by criteria that emanate from this network of individual experts and organisations. Even the accidental encounters

of the coppicers with dormice in a remote part of the reserve (far from observation by outside bodies) was dominated by a 'fear' of transgressing the criteria set for encounters with dormice. I illustrate this in more detail later.

## Jill and Jack

On Thursday, October 25, 2012 I met with Jill and Jack to take part in their monitoring of five dormouse boxes. There are over a hundred boxes stationed in various areas of the reserve, which are checked twice a year to record if they are being used.

In his rucksack, Jack carried a GPS tracker, maps, compass, a notebook, and monitoring record forms. We located by GPS the first dormouse box, and the other four boxes were located by the use of a compass. I was surprised to discover that, we needed a GPS device and a compass to find dormouse boxes in an English woodland. I was further surprised to find that after becoming completely focused on the activities in hand, I found myself disorientated and, although I knew this part of the reserve woodland relatively well, and given that we were only twenty-five yards from the nearest pathway through the woods, I experienced a momentary feeling of being lost. In that short moment I felt a fear of the 'wildwood' that I had only previously experienced in the middle of the night when camping alone in the reserve. I had not anticipated that monitoring dormice would lead me to such an experience, and the surprise heightened my realisation that I was no longer a visitor controlling my own experience of engaging with dormice, but part of the woodland world they inhabit. I was experiencing the reserve's woodland in a way that was new to me. On reflection, I was no longer seeing a separation between the woodland and myself, I was no longer feeling that I was an intruder in another world, I was experiencing dwelling.

The boxes are constructed and erected for dormice, but are also used regularly by bluetits and great tits, wood mice and yellow-throated wood mice, and a wide range of invertebrates such as tree slugs. I personally was ignorant of tree slugs' existence until Jill and Jack drew my attention to them. Through their practical engagement monitors encounter the reserve's woodland and wildlife in

ways that few other social actors can have the privilege of experiencing.

Extensive knowledge of natural history is invaluable when it comes to identifying the presence of dormice in woodland. In conversation with Jack, Jill and Dot I discovered that the presence of dormice is usually confirmed by secondary evidence such as nests. Dormice construct their nests from a beautiful latticework of plant material, quite often the shredded bark of honeysuckle. They are intricate constructions, like the more frequently seen nests of long-tailed tits, that are often made of lichen and the threads from spiders' webs. Seeing a nest of shredded bark was unexpected but not as unexpected as the realisation it brought to me of the holistic nature of the ecology. Understanding more of the everyday life of the dormouse stimulated reflection on the way I understood, perceived and acted toward the natural world (or, to use a different vocabulary, the nonhuman). However, it took several more experiences before I became fully aware that there were other ways of relating to the natural world of the reserve than to what I had been used to, and that my informants were experiencing the reserve in ways that I had not anticipated.

On this expedition I was privileged to see an active dormouse; it was a sinewy weasel-like creature, not the dormouse that I had previously seen represented in the media, as a foetal-fluffy ball. This encounter was only brief, but made me aware that their lives had a meaning beyond that represented in the media. They are active and sinuous, not the sleepy fat beings beloved by the popular press.

To most people Jill and Jack appear to work as a team, however, during our short dormouse monitoring exercise (while checking five dormouse boxes) it was apparent that they were experiencing the reserve's woodland and wildlife differently. I noted that Jill was less focused on the monitoring exercise and more on what was more widely encountered. In addition to monitoring the dormice, she was equally aware of the life of the woodland in which we were immersed. The fungi particularly fascinated her, especially a large troop (fungi in a close group, but not close enough to be called a cluster) of white fungi shaped like water towers. Later during my interviews with her it was also evident that she had developed her understanding of the reserve's landscape

over the years by painting, drawing and photographing the woodland flora, often by concentrating on the minute details of plant structures. During her interview, Jill confirmed that she found the structures and details of 'nature' fascinating. By focusing on the detail she gained greater understanding of the meaning she found in nature.

Alternatively, Jack's appreciation of the act of surveying and monitoring dormice stemmed from the gathering and organising of data. As mentioned earlier he came to the reserve with a rucksack, clipboard, GPS and other equipment for dormouse surveying and confirmed that he had a preference for collecting and organising the data that he and Jill gathered. For Jack, the meaning he finds in monitoring dormice appears to be governed by his rational disposition. He explained in an interview:

I'm very much a pigeonholer. I like to get data and not just have it dispersed but organised. Be able to say what does this mean. How does it relate to this that and the other? How can you put this in a form that can be read and understood by others?

## Dot

Dot explained that her involvement with monitoring dormice occurred by chance. She joined the Trust on retirement and became involved in botanical surveying and monitoring in 1992. She first encountered dormice when she was carrying out botanical fieldwork and found a winter dormouse nest. She recounted that:

We found it on the ground amongst the brambles – we saw this lovely round ball and we said that can only be a dormouse nest – so we knew that we got them in the wood and that sparked an interest and we were very excited.

Encountering a dormouse nest sparked an interest in dormice to the extent that Dot monitored the one hundred dormice boxes, once a month, from April to November for twenty years. This took her into the woods for many hours each month.

However, even after all of her perseverance, the limits of how much can be



known about dormice is reflected in the following. When questioned about the size of the dormouse population Dot replied that she had:

No idea! We always say that we hope we've got a bigger population than we have evidence of and I think that must be true. The maximum number of individuals we have had in any one year . . . two or three years ago was twenty-seven but that included several young families. This year we've seen one or two each month and that's much more the norm.

In addition to only occasionally encountering dormice during many hours of monitoring, until recently Dot was unable to identify individual dormice. However, a new innovation in dormouse monitoring that involves clipping small marks in their fur, allows individuals to be identified. To be able to identify individual dormice Dot found exciting and reported that, 'It was nice seeing the same chap for two years'. She believed that knowing the individual changed her understanding of dormice but, unfortunately, soon after she starting clipping, and before she was able to fully appreciate the benefits of knowing the individual, she retired. She felt knowing individuals was of great importance and commented, 'I only wish we had started fur clipping years ago it would have so changed our understanding of dormice'.

The importance of knowing individuals is reported in Mitman's (2005) chapter on Pachyderm personalities where he reports on Douglas-Hamilton's study that involved four and a half years of intimate association with elephants where he came to know them as individuals and understood their social organisation in terms of individual lives. That resulted in the elephant community being understood as 'an elephant society, not a population' (Mitman, 2005 p.185). If Dot had been able to continue her study she might have developed a different understanding of the lives of the reserve's dormice and, although this is speculative, may have been able, like Douglas-Hamilton, to provide evidence of the importance of individual dormice and their social relationships. This supports Crist's (2000) and Kheel's (2008) ecofeminist critique of knowing and understanding other life forms as species as opposed to knowing them as individuals.

Although not directly articulated by Dot, Jill or Jack, the volunteers are all aware of the privilege of ‘meeting’ dormice and the access to the reserve’s woodland that monitoring dormice gives to them. Monitoring enables them not only to encounter dormice but also to become immersed in the woodland and engage with the nonhuman in ways that are in tune with the way they perceive the world about them and the way they wish to engage with the woodland and wildlife.

## An Unexpected Encounter

As I have already indicated, it is only rarely that volunteers other than those monitoring dormice ‘meet’ dormice. During my fieldwork, the only observation of encounters with dormice, rather than with signs of dormice, took place as the coppicers were clearing a coppice coupe of plastic tree guards. The tree guards had been installed many years previously to protect newly planted oak trees. As the trees that the guards were protecting had either died or no longer needed protection, the guards were considered untidy and an unnecessary intrusion into the ‘naturalness’ of the reserve’s woodland.

The coppicers were working in two groups and, much to the surprise of both groups, as they removed the tree guards they discovered ‘sleeping’ dormice. I was with a group of coppicers led by Ted, the reserve’s manager, who was surprised and greatly concerned that he had a dormouse in his hands. After the great surprise and excitement of finding a dormouse, his first concern was that he was not licensed to handle dormice. He was aware that it is illegal to disturb a protected species and found himself in rather a quandary about the action he should take. After a brief discussion it was decided that we should return the creature, as best we could, to the location in which we had discovered it. However, we could not resist the temptation of taking a look at the creature with the two others who were with us before we returned the dormouse and its nest to its place of discovery.

Seeing a dormouse is such a rare event that we were greatly disappointed that we could not share our sighting with the other group of coppicers, however, this

would not have been 'playing the conservation game'. Our guilt at not sharing the experience was short-lived as the other group had also discovered a dormouse in similar circumstances and had taken the same action, returning it to where it was found. This other group was not being led by a professional conservationist, but they were still aware of the rules of the game that emanate from the ecological conservation field, and they also abided by the rules of the game.

Simon remembered an encounter with a dormouse and confirmed that that it was one of his best experiences in ten years of involvement with the reserve:

Years ago when we were removing tree guards which was a very tedious task – we were tidying up the woods and it was there I discovered dormice for the first time by finding a dormouse nest with young in it. Sadly I'm not sure the dormice would have survived the discovery. But nevertheless it was fascinating holding and feeling a dormouse, I've never experienced a moment like that before.

This experience of Simon's highlights the problem of slipping into portraying individuals as 'ideal types'. He could stand in my study as the ideal type of individual that engages with the natural world rationally, but portraying him and others this way, only gives a one-sided picture of their complex relationships with the world about them. His rational scientific engagement with the nonhuman is tempered by an affective engagement evident in this account of his encounter.

The above is but a brief outline of how the social actors of the reserve inquire into the lives of the reserve's dormice and how, through their participation in monitoring, engage with them and the other wildlife of the reserve. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine how volunteers' involvement in observing and surveying and monitoring wildlife other than the dormice of the reserve, can help us to understand how they engage with, and inhabit the natural world, and how their engagement can be understood in terms of habitus and dwelling.

## Monitoring Bats

During my study of the reserve, a local bat group conducted several exercises to monitor bats. I knew of the group organiser, Sid, through the reserve's social network; he became my gatekeeper and generously gave me access to observe the activities of the group. For reasons that will emerge later, membership of a local bat group is by invitation only and I was privileged to be invited into the network of Sid's bat group. During my fieldwork and in interviews with members of Sid's group, I became aware that bat groups often have a common structure where the leaders' skills and knowledge place them in a position of authority, which they use to regulate group membership. Access to a bat group is important to new entrants embarking on a career in ecology since, in order to operate an ecological consultancy that surveys and monitors bats, they are required to obtain various licences issued by Natural England. The mentoring of new entrants by an already qualified licence holder is the key to gaining a licence. As a reason for volunteering, career advancement sets the, generally, younger bat monitors apart from the older volunteers engaged in surveying and monitoring tasks.



Figure 7.1: A Bat in the Hand – Moments Before Release

The exclusiveness of membership and the authority of the group leader was confirmed to me on an occasion when I had already taken part in several bat

monitoring sessions. I assumed, although not formally invited, that I could join another session without asking permission. When I arrived Sid greeted me by asking me in a semi-hostile tone 'What are you doing here?' It was the sort of exchange that was common between Sid and me, however, I took it as a warning not to overstep the terms of my welcome and that I should be careful to follow the rules of the bat group by showing suitable deference to his authority. After my frosty reception, however, I was made welcome throughout the following six or seven hours when we monitored the bats of the reserve.

During my fieldwork I took part in a number of bat monitoring events. Two of these events lasted for over two weeks and involved monitoring from dusk until dawn or until the bats became inactive. The bats controlled the monitors' sleep patterns over the monitoring period, and the duration of the monitoring exercise was defined by the life of the transponder attached to the bats. Monitoring usually involved observing bats as they emerged from their daytime roosts, and tracking them with equipment that was able to pick up signals from the transponders attached to their bodies as they hunted for insects from dusk until two or three in the morning and, on occasion, until dawn. Bats are commonly assumed to be predominantly nocturnal, although with the use of modern tracking devices it is apparent that their night-time activity is much more crepuscular in nature. In general humans are absent from the reserve at night, and the monitoring of bats, along with nightingales, offers a rare opportunity to participate in an activity where the volunteers can experience being in woodland at night.

The licensing of monitors to handle bats regulates human-bat interaction, and limits such encounters to the few individuals who are licensed. The regulatory procedures for engaging with bats share similarities with the way that human contact with other wild animals, such as birds and dormice, is organised and controlled through licensing. However, in the case of bats, the holding of a licence is essential to the professional ecologist who is engaged in the commercial surveying and monitoring of bats. The need to obtain a bat licence is, amongst the participants in Sid's bat group, both career-driven and interest driven and has a considerable impact on the make-up of the group. As the reader

will recall, in Chapter Five Maud highlighted that the younger volunteers' involvement was mostly instrumentally motivated, and this was also the case for many members of the bat group. Instrumental motives may, in part, offer an explanation of why the bat group has a younger demographic and is not primarily composed of older people. The bat monitors' minimal relationship with the social networks of the reserve and the Trust can be understood as a consequence of their instrumental involvement in monitoring.

The demographics of the bat group and network are different from that of the coppicers and this can be explained by their instrumental approach to their task and their career interests. Sid, the expert who leads and organises the monitoring activities of the bat group, is over forty years of age, although most members are under forty and many are also under thirty. Many of the younger members of the bat group had only recently entered careers in environmental consultancy. Career advancement, the relatively recent development of technology for bat monitoring, and the fact that it is a night-time activity appears to be attractive to younger participants, whereas the same criteria appears to discourage the involvement of my older informants. However, for these older participants close, intimate contact with the bats themselves appears to counter their feelings about such unsocial night-time activities. All of Sid's bat group members are in employment, whereas most of the reserve's coppicers and volunteers are retired. All but one of the bat group were also university graduates and the one exception had gained professional qualifications.

The gender balance in the bat group is approximately equal, although in a typically patriarchal manner, most of the 'experts' are male, and there is little crossover membership between the bat group, and the reserve's coppicers and other conservation volunteers. This contrasts with those involved in dormouse monitoring and its networks, who engage extensively with other volunteers and the networks of the reserve. Amongst the coppicers and other volunteers it was only Kate and myself who committed fully to participating in the bat group's monitoring activities. Kate's motivation to engage in bat monitoring was not instrumentally driven as was mine and that of many of the bat volunteers. She was interested in bats for their own sake and was also fortunate to have a

lifestyle that provided her with the opportunity to engage in bat monitoring at night. We were accepted as part of the bat group during the monitoring exercises but unlike our experience as coppicers where we became permanent members of the coppicing network, our links with the bat group did not continue after the monitoring exercise ended. My own and Kate's access and acceptance into the bat group by Sid and the other members was aided by our having been actively involved in other surveying and monitoring projects.

Other than during surveying and monitoring, bats, like dormice, are rarely encountered at close quarters or 'held-in-the-hand'; the only exception is when bats are taken from the fine nets that are strung across their flight paths in the woodland to trap them. This is done so that they can be identified, sexed, measured and weighed before being released; this handling gives both the licensed bat monitor and other observers the opportunity to observe bats close up. When encountered in this way bats can have a surprising and unexpected 'cuteness' that can create an unexpected affective response from those new to such close encounters with bats. Such a response contrasts sharply with the long held 'mythical' fear of bats that is general in western cultures. 'Meeting' bats at close quarters questions the basis of such fear. During one evening of monitoring, a number of non-regular participants were experiencing bats at close quarters for the first time. This group stood around Sid as he measured and recorded details of bats' anatomies. One bat was then released by being placed on the back of his hand. Long-eared bats lower their ears when at rest but in preparation for flight the ears uncurl and become erect. This action of the bat created a collective sigh of delight from the audience, a totally unexpected response during 'scientific' ecological monitoring. Thus affective responses to the natural world can occur that are contrary to participants' expectations.

### **Reflexivity: The Woodland at Night**

The affective response to this one bat focused my attention on how others respond to the natural world, and caused me to reflect on how I have related to the various elements of the natural world that I have encountered throughout my lifelong interest in wildlife. Following in the footsteps of C. W. Mills, an American sociologist, and accepting that academic research is commonly driven

by personal interest, I slowly came to accept my personal role in my research. For example, I camped at night in an effort to come to terms with my own relationship with the natural world; although I was doing it in order to understand the reserve's woodland and its wildlife for my research during these adventures I immersed myself in the setting, and experienced many rewarding and occasionally fearful experiences. At the beginning of my research my understanding of the woodland environment would be familiar to that of many others whose understanding is based on society's general acceptance of woodland myths and legends. Fear was my greatest concern when I was alone in the dark of the woodland. It was an emotional response that was hard to rationalise and overcome. A leaf falling in the silence of the night became, in my imagination, a fearsome beast or a human intruder and only the return of light in the morning allayed such fears.

The only antidote to my fear at night was being in the company of others, when I shared in the monitoring of bats and nightingales at night fear never entered into my thoughts, but when I was engaged in similar activities alone, fears were ever present. Quite where my fear of woodland emerged from remains a question on which I can only speculate. In the industrial working-class culture of my childhood, forest and woodland were not a physical or literary reality. The traditional bedtime story was absent, although it is inconceivable that I did not encounter some stories of 'the forest' as being a dangerous place, or, perhaps for me, fear could be simply explained as a fear of the unknown. Whatever the explanation, and although I can now claim some experience of Horwood at night, the woods at night are still a fearful place. In 2011, when surveying nightingales – which is best done at night when their singing is not swamped out by other bird song – I camped in the woods for several nights. I had pitched my tent close to a path and a gate. At three in the morning I was awoken from fitful sleep by the noise of the gate being opened and closed. I froze in my sleeping bag so as not to attract attention to myself, and even though I knew that someone might be in the woods recording the nightingales' song and that my tent was well hidden, for the rest of the night sleep escaped me. My night-time experiences highlight how the woodland, like the bats and dormice, induces an affective response which is not under rational control, and



provides another example of the way affect is involved in social actors' engagement with the reserve's woodland and its nonhuman inhabitants.

I will now return to the experiences of the bat monitoring group and specifically those of Bill and Lily. I will consider how their general and specific habitus and rational and affective dispositions shape their encounters with the bats of the reserve. I focus on the bat volunteers here as, unlike most of my other informants, they are absent from much of my analysis. Lily was twenty-five and Bill was twenty-six when I joined them in their bat monitoring activities. They were partners and acted as a team in their monitoring activities, but they experienced the natural world that they were monitoring in quite different ways.

Lily and Bill live in a village near the reserve and were interviewed as we waited for the bats to emerge and be caught in the nets that Sid and the team had placed in their likely flight paths. Anticipating the flight paths of bats when little is initially known of their feeding behaviour, is more luck than judgement, although it soon became apparent as we tracked the bats that they were, or at least could be, creatures of habit. The same bat often returned to the same area of the reserve to hunt for food. For most of the participants monitoring bats was a game of hide and seek that could provide great highs when a bat was located, and immense frustration when none could be found. Frustration often led to the monitors attributing intentionality to the bats, with comments such as, 'They seem to be hiding from us'. This interpretation is an example of the lack of purchase of a purely scientific behaviour. In the future, when the lives of bats are more fully understood, we may discover that the presence of bat monitors and the technology used to track them is disrupting their lives, and they were purposefully avoiding this human intrusion into their animal world.

Unlike Lily, who as a child was introduced by her parents to birds and 'nature', Bill has no recollection of such experiences and, although interested in biology at school, commented, 'My interest in ecology only came into play whilst I was at university'. Amongst my informants it was only Bill and Mary who did not associate their interest in nature with early childhood encounters with nature. My data in this, and earlier chapters, tends to confirm Bourdieu's theory that an

individual's general habitus retains some permanence throughout their life, however, my data also show that informants' habitus can be re-shaped to some extent by the cultural fields in which they engage.



Figure 7.2: Sid's Bat Monitoring Group

Lily's general habitus shows continuity. She remembers:

My first memory of being interested in wildlife was when I was five and I have a very vivid memory, and I don't know what was leading up to the memory I have and what happened after, but I remember sitting at home in the dining room looking out into the back garden and watching the birds in the garden and I must have had an ID book I think it was maybe a Collins – really basic Collins Bird book and I was looking at the birds and then I was trying to find the picture that match – properly simple – match the bird to the picture and go and yes that's where it started and is just always been with me since then.

For Lily 'it' is just part of her life but the question remains what is this 'it' that she refers to? From my experience in sharing in the lives of my informants and

collecting data about their lives the 'it' that Lily and my other informants are concerned with has three elements. The first is an object of interest, which for them is 'nature' and can be seen as all encompassing, such as the 'outdoors' or as specific as a species of plant or animal. The second part is a need to 'know' about the object of interest; for example, in Lily's memory 'matching the bird to the picture' is a fulfilling exercise. The final element is the impossibility of knowing the infinite variability of nature, which means that there is always something new to discover.

In contrast to Lily, Bill's habitus developed in accordance with the cultural fields that he experienced later in life. He is one of the few amongst my informants who was not introduced to the natural world in early life. For Lily there is continuity between her general and specific habitus, whereas for Bill there is no such continuity. Bill was interested in biology at secondary school, and studied environmental biology at university before working in environmental consultancy. However, as his career developed he was dissatisfied with the ethics of commercial environmental consultancy. He anticipated that his attitudes and values and the way he was disposed to act toward the natural world would 'fit' more closely with those of the cultural field of arboriculture rather than those of the field of commercial environmentalism. He explained:

I'm not a huge fan of what I do and don't like environmental and ecological consultancy and I have worries. I initially got into it thinking I could do some good and something positive would come out of it but I've grown more cynical and realised that it's mainly a PR thing. Yes, it is this kind of making it acceptable and making it nice and woolly and cuddly for the general public, thinking everyone is happy, you know, and almost that everything is better afterwards than it was before and at least you obtain the sort of same level afterwards – as there was before, but essentially you were working for the developers, you're paid by them, your job is to get their planning permission, so, it's not necessarily putting a spin on it but making it a bit shinier.

Bill's ecological career has not satisfied him but he hopes that arboriculture will provide him with more meaningful encounters with trees and woodland: He explained this in the following way:

ancient woodlands especially ones with very nice ancient trees, give me a sense of self and a connection with history. [Horwood] . . . being a large woodland also adds to that feeling you get that you're almost stepping back in time. It gives me a sense of history. I suppose because it [has] remained in situ for so long it's that sort of connection with the past. You know there are very few habitats in this country, which have remained, unchanged – well there are none that have remained arguably unchanged. Semi-natural ancient woodland has had the least significant intervention from man, and therefore it looks the way it does now . . . so it gives you a sense of what it would have been like long, long ago.

Bill is now seeking to work with trees in the hope that he will find a form of interaction with ancient woodland that ecology consultancy failed to provide for him. Although Bill's relationship with the reserve's woodland and wildlife was viewed through his bat monitoring activities, it became apparent, in the time I spent with him and from my interview data, that he finds great meaning in trees and particularly ancient woodland trees. This may offer an explanation of why he is retraining as an arboriculturalist as this will bring him into physical rather than abstract contact with trees.

I knew Bill as a member of the bat monitoring group, a group that conformed to the ecological 'game' – not a 'game' that Bill wished to play. However, like many of my informants, he found that involvement with the reserve offered the opportunity to engage in activities that suited the dispositions of his habitus.

In this chapter I have highlighted how 'scientific' or affective dispositions are related to the way in which my informants prefer to participate in activities, and how such dispositions facilitate them in drawing closer to the meanings that the natural world holds for them. I have also indicated that my older informants have advanced beyond a general and specific habitus as defined by Bourdieu

(1977), Wacquant (2004) and Desmond (2007). In later life they have accumulated social, economic and cultural capital, and have experienced the rare opportunity of being reflexive and selective of the waters in which they swim. They are no longer limited in choice by the demands of their careers.

The behaviour of my informants, even when they are immersed in the woodland or activities such as monitoring or coppicing, reflects their habitus in the ways such activities are performed. The activities in which my informants participate and how they do so are related to their habitus, and specifically their rational or affective dispositions. The surveyors and monitors can be divided into those who take part in activities corresponding with either their rational or affective dispositions in accordance with the ideal types I set out earlier. However, neither disposition is exclusively dominant, and in their activities informants value the scientific data that is produced as well as having an emotional appreciation of the 'nature' they encounter.

## The Naturalist–Ecologist Dichotomy

In the previous section, I focused my analysis on the ways in which staff and volunteers encountered the material world when they 'scientifically' surveyed and monitored the reserve. These practices of surveying and monitoring are shaped by the culture of the field of ecological science. In this section, I consider the encounters they have with the material world of the reserve as they perform their everyday activities. I characterise the context of these encounters as ones that owe more to natural history and the naturalist approach to the study of wildlife rather than ecological science. As the reader will recall, I have previously conceptualised the naturalist as an ideal type who is the polar opposite to the scientific ecologist–environmentalist. The important characteristic I ascribe to the naturalist, and now natural history, is the space that is given for affect and meaning to be introduced into the way the natural world is encountered and understood (Crist, 2000). The wildlife conservation culture of the reserve is dominated by 'scientific' ecology, but staff and volunteers in their everyday encounters depart from this culture in how they engage with and understand the reserve. In the following section, I unpack how my informants' inclinations toward being both naturalists and ecologists,

impinges on how they are involved with and understand the natural world of the reserve.

I begin with Erica, as she was struggling with being a retired ecologist and naturalist. I interviewed her just after she had retired from working as a professional ecologist and was, in the following week, moving from the home she had lived in for many years on the edge of the reserve's woodland to a new home some seventy-five miles away. She had been an active member of the Trust and many other local conservation organisations for many years and was known to most of my informants through her activities. She expressed worries about how the natural world is understood when an exclusively scientific approach is taken.

Erica's lifelong interest in the natural world was shaped for many years through her employment in various roles as an ecologist where she was extensively involved in the study of 'nature' through the use of scientific ecological methodologies. During most of my fieldwork, I understood Erica to be a professional ecologist and to me she had mostly expressed herself using the language of the ecologist. However, when I interviewed her just before she moved away, technical language was left behind and she began to talk of the conflict that arose from being both a naturalist and an ecologist:

I'm a naturalist and ecologist. Yes, academically I know exactly what we should be doing, but by my natural instinct and my natural feeling for the land you know what is wrong and what is right and what is used by which species. And if that tree falls down what will come in to replace it. You know it inside your head, you don't need to read lots of books and things and I think it is just prescriptive. It's how it all interconnects: you change one thing and you change something else as well. I've been here, what, ten years and I walked in the woods, virtually every day and I know how it works. I know where the bullfinches are and where the little muntjac home is in that really lovely patch of deep scrub.

Later she explained about surveying trees:

When I'm doing tree surveying I'm looking at everything else as well.

It was like when we were doing tree surveying, which was fairly boring but I'd be looking at the mosses and I'd look at the little tiny fruiting bodies that are beautiful and I'd listen to the birds so it's the whole feel really – it's being outside in the fresh air.

In her own words, it is 'the whole feel' and although still involved in surveying trees, here she is explaining how broad her appreciation of the natural world is, from the all-encompassing fresh air of the outdoors to the minute fruiting bodies of moss.

She further demonstrated the conflict between her affective and scientific dispositions at the very end of the interview, when she expressed her frustration about the way that the reserve was managed. It is implicit in her response to my question that ecologically-based habitat management frustrates her. Here she is being critical of how the scrub is cleared on the basis of an ecological understanding of habitat rather than on the basis of a wider, holistic perspective. When questioning the removal of scrub for ecological reasons she went on to criticise such reasoning and, when talking about the destruction of an area of scrub that muntjac deer used to lie up in, she moved from the scientific term habitat to the more affective term 'home'. She defended her affective understanding of the muntjacs' world as follows:

If you read their [Natural England] criteria trying to define things it goes on for pages and pages but it fails to recognise the naturalness of things – they solely depend on a set of rules and regulations and I find that very hard – I would never be able to get a job with Natural England. It all interconnects, you change one thing and you change something else as well.

In pursuit of her career, Erica had to conform to the games of the ecological cultural field. In the preceding statements she articulates her frustration with an objectivist ecological approach, although she had followed the rules of the ecological game throughout her ecological career. She notes the lack of appreciation attributed to the naturalists' understanding of 'nature' in the ecological 'field' and emphasises the interconnectedness of all living things. Criticism of ecological objectivism often emerged from my informants who

have an affective disposition towards the natural world, even though they have spent an extensive part of their lives involved in the ecological cultural field where their specific habitus evolved. Scientific ecology is demonstrated by Crist (2000) to be a cultural field with a language that excludes affect and meaning from the natural world.

For many years, Erica, has conformed to a culture where the scientific is valued over the affective, but her own perspective on how the natural world is best understood has changed as she nears retirement, after witnessing a very insensitive act of habitat management that failed to value the scrub as the ‘home’ of the muntjac deer. She feels in her heart what is best for the natural world. Erica, the scientific ecologist, knows how in terms of Natural England the ecological environment ‘works’, but in the everyday life of the reserve the ecological scientific prescriptions for nature neglects affect, which Erica understands as the ‘naturalness’ of things.

All of my informants value being in the outdoors, but what they specifically value in the natural world varies immensely. However, no matter how their individual lives have evolved, they have held on to the interests that became significant to them as children. Erica as a child was fascinated with the ‘tiny’. ‘From my early days . . . I was always playing outside in the fields and looking at the little tiny insects.’ She was so fascinated with the tiny that she took a degree in microbiology, became a professional ecologist and acquired a scientific perspective. However, as with many of my other informants, it is ‘the whole feel’ that matters. I discuss this at some length in Chapter Six when I discuss the importance, to my informants, of having a ‘feeling’ of dwelling, and in Chapter Eight when my informants talk about affective experiences that they describe as ‘magical’.

As I have conducted this research and analysed my data, a number of dichotomies such as employee–volunteer, naturalist–ecologist, economic–aesthetic value, rural–urban, working-class/middle-class, natural–cultural, and wild–managed have surfaced. One of these is a rational–affective dichotomy, which I have suggested can be seen as an ideal type. Although useful for



analysis, none of these dichotomies or ideal types, are present in everyday life. Jack may prefer to take a scientific approach to monitoring the dormouse population and gains satisfaction from ordering and organising his monitoring along scientific lines, but he also appreciates the aesthetic beauty of the woodland. Jill or Dot would not deny the contribution to dormouse knowledge of the records that Jack and other like-minded monitors produce, but for them the activity of monitoring dormice provides an affective experience that relates to their own dispositions, and the ‘meaning’ that the natural world of the reserve has for them.

Throughout my research it has been apparent that social actors behave toward the reserve and perceive it in many different ways even when involved in the same endeavour of promoting the well-being of the reserve. Using the related concepts of habitus and cultural fields, in the remainder of this chapter I will endeavour to unpack how my informants’ dispositions and perceptions are related to the way they participate in surveying and monitoring, and how these dispositions and perceptions shape their everyday encounters with the natural world.

## Dispositions and Ways of Participating

As I have already argued, scientific or affective dispositions are not exclusive but a tendency of the habitus. However, the habitus must relate to fields that are encountered by social actors. Jill, Jack and Dot’s dispositions may differ in terms of being more or less scientific or affective, but they have to operate within a wildlife conservation cultural field that is dominated by the scientific values of ecology and for which the affective is problematic. The affective values and ‘meanings’ that are apparent to many of my informants in the woodland, wildlife and natural world of the reserve are poorly understood in a cultural field dominated by science and ecology. However, this awareness of the potential role of affective knowledge in creating a wider holistic understanding of the natural world is evident in the work of Crist (2000) and Kheel (2008). They identify an ability to incorporate the affective into the human-natural world relationship. It should be remembered that when published, Carson’s (1963) *Silent Spring*, a volume that is now seen as the precursor of the

environmental movement, was attacked for its emotive presentation of environmental issues. Dot's archive of her data collected as she monitored dormice is a highly professional ecological archive and comes from a background of human encounters with woodland, wildlife and 'nature' that is lacking in a spread sheet of tabulated dormouse data. The value of such encounters to the understanding of the entangled world of humans and nonhumans can easily be discounted in a cultural field dominated by scientific ecological approaches. When Dot talked about her favourite time of year she explained, 'May, it's absolutely beautiful, the leaves are just coming out, they're so beautifully green and there's still the ransoms and the bluebells it's just lovely.' However, she then went on to make a significant comment about how the seasons are changing. Her understanding had not come from tabulated records but from everyday experience. She explained:

When I first started [with Valley Wood] if I took a group around which I did on a number of occasions and they wanted to go in bluebells time I would say middle May but by the time I'd been going out there for ten or maybe fifteen years . . . you would have to say if you want to see the bluebells you would need to go at the beginning of May.

Dot may have visited the bluebells because of an aesthetic appreciation of spring flowers, but it resulted in her understanding of how the flowering time of bluebells had changed over a relatively short period.

She commented in her interview that 'I can't remember a time when I wasn't interested in some way in wildlife.' She also recalled that:

In the junior school we used to go for nature walks. One of the things we had to do was make a flower diary – of course you couldn't do it nowadays and we pressed these flowers and I got ever so many and I learnt the Latin names as well as the English names. So that was where I started.

Dot still has some of the wild flowers she pressed at school. She went on to university to study botany, biology, and geography and afterwards she had a

career teaching biology and ecology at a girls' school. She went on to use her ecological knowledge to measure and count the flora and fauna of Valley Wood. She stood out in the way she combined affective and scientific approaches to understanding the natural world. Dot's accounts of the dormice and other wildlife of Valley Wood are neither overly emotional nor rational, but demonstrate the value of having hybrid dispositions.

As I have already demonstrated, Bill and Lily have a common interest in the natural world and are extensively involved in bat monitoring. However, they have distinctly different dispositions; his being more rational and hers affective. In my data and in the relevant literature there is some indication that gender may be a contributory factor to dispositions toward categories of the natural world, for example most birdwatchers are men. However, in my study, gender appears to be much more relevant to informants' 'scientific' or affective dispositions. During my interviews with Mary and Erica, who were both professional ecologists, their scientific dispositions were often juxtaposed with affective and aesthetic references. Mary uses artistic representations of the reserve's 'nature' to express the affective meaning that the natural world holds for her. In a recent conversation she stated that now she is retired and has the time, all she wants to do is paint and draw elements of the natural world that hold significant meaning for her, such as the way that wind moves through the trees, to the extent that this is becoming an obsession.

While differences in the ways that the natural world of the reserve is encountered can be related to scientific or affective dispositions, my informants also demonstrate strong preferences for the type of flora and fauna they wish to observe and engage with. For example, George becomes preoccupied with wild orchids when they are in flower, and Bert and Tim with birdsong.

As we saw in the previous chapter, most of my informants report that their interest in a particular part of the natural world emerged after a formative encounter with the outdoors and wildlife that was in many cases, initiated in childhood by a close family member. As characterised by Bourdieu, general habitus is seen as having a significant influence throughout life, and many of

my informants remain attached to the natural world that they first encountered in early life. In the following section of this chapter, I explore how Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', habitus, and disposition can be used to explain the relationship between their life trajectories and the way that they engage with the natural world of the reserve.

## Habitus: Dispositions and Natural World Encounters

In Chapter Five, I discussed extensively the early involvement of my informants with the natural world. While individual lives followed very different paths many of them maintained their childhood interests. Here I focus on Bert and George to demonstrate how their habitus and dispositions shape their engagement with the reserve. Bert was first introduced to trees by his father, which fostered his interest. His life path took him to a career in forestry (after taking a forestry degree), whereas George continued in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and was a farm worker for most of his life. Economics and science were at the core of the culture of employment that Bert experienced, whereas George's life was spent in a cultural field dominated by agricultural economics; working on the land, however, gave George the opportunity to engage with the natural world around him without having it subjected to scientific scrutiny. For Bert his general habitus predisposed him towards a career in forestry, whereas for George his general habitus predisposed him to a career in agriculture.

Bert talked of his career and his approach to the natural world in the following way:

I was always more interested in the natural science rather than the timber science. I was never that interested in the harvesting. I was always more interested in the growing [of trees] and the associated wildlife. At that time, this was the beginning of the 70s, the concept of amenity forestry and other things apart from timber and utility wood were just coming in. Yes, so I came in at the right time.

In his career Bert found a disjunction between forestry culture and his own disposition toward the natural world and managed forests. He was fortunate,

however, that he entered forestry as the culture was changing and, although he embodies aspects of the specific commercial forestry culture he encountered during his career, the culture of forestry was moving in a direction more akin to his own understanding and the way he is disposed to engage with the natural world. It was changing into one that values the amenity and wildlife elements of forests and woodland and, as Bert reports, ‘I came in [to forestry] at the right time.’ His statement highlights cultural changes that were rebalancing the way that forestry was moving, from valuing forests in purely economic terms, to taking a wider view that allowed for them to be seen to have affective value.

When interviewed, Bert explained, that he was a birdwatcher and not ‘a twitcher’, which was for him an important distinction. He was quite definite in his comment:

I'm not a twitcher I don't go rushing off looking for rarities . . . I always keep an eye out for birds and as you know I lead the dawn chorus walk here in the spring, I think I'm quite good at most birdsong and another advantage of walking in the woodland in spring is that you get the birdsong. I just think it's magical, particularly the early morning in the spring when the light is just beginning to drift in and the colours change and the atmosphere changes, particularly if there's a bit of mist about and then woodland has a particular character all of its own and the birdsong penetrates. I just find well – it's good for the soul.

Here Bert is establishing how he relates to the natural world by contrasting himself with a character that is ridiculed by the media – twitchers are portrayed as shallow individuals who collect bird sightings as if they are collecting train numbers. Bert is pointing out that he has a very different view of woodland to that of a twitcher. He is articulating a relationship with the reserve’s woodland and wildlife that resonates with the way that Ingold (1993) conceptualised landscapes being dwelt in.

References to spirituality by my informants are common and, although Bert has spent his career in senior management working for commercial forestry, Bert’s

affective attachment to the natural world has remained with him throughout his life. His career in forestry may have challenged the affective dispositions he acquired in childhood, but they have not been lost, and are still relevant to the way he engages with the natural world in later life.

Where Bert has encountered cultural fields to which he is not fully disposed, George has remained, other than for a period as a submariner in the British Royal Navy, in cultural fields very similar to that of his childhood. The ways of engaging with the natural world that he inherited from his father and grandfather were embodied in early life, and even when challenged by encountering other cultural fields he has not engaged with their attitudes and values. In his life course, George, has not entered or willingly engaged with cultural fields that challenged the attitudes, values and dispositions of his general habitus (see Chapter Five). His ways of perceiving and understanding the natural world embodied in childhood, have remained with him throughout his life.

George has been a visible actor in the everyday life of the reserve for the last ten years. He is central to the world of the reserve and makes a substantial contribution to the way that many social actors experience that world. Maud found George a great help when she joined the volunteers in her early sixties. She had little experience of being in woodland and doing practical work, but was eager to learn. In her interview she commented, ‘Most people are very easy to talk to and everybody has their own little strengths so if you get a chance to talk you often learn something. George is exceptional because he's so willing to help.’ George has a way of engaging with the reserve that many of my informants wish was available to them.

To explore the concept of the naturalist as a social actor embedded in the natural world, I focus on George, and use a lengthy section of his interview transcript to illuminate how his general and specific habitus fuse. The status of ‘the naturalist’ is an accolade that my informants only rarely confer on others. This is partially due to the intangibility of what ‘makes’ a naturalist and the fact that my informants find it easier to define who is not a naturalist rather than who is.

It emerges from my data that being an expert does not create a naturalist. However, exploring how George engages with the reserve may offer some understanding of a way of engaging with the natural world that predates the current ecological paradigm.

## Conceptualising the Naturalist

George has spent most of his life as a farm worker, or worked in woodland, and describes his childhood as follows:

I was born in a really little village I think there are only sixty-four people living there. I thought that was the world until I joined the forces. But we all knew everybody. And we knew everywhere. The village was the world as far as I was concerned

A farm worker, George's father, introduced him to finding birds' nests as a child. When interviewed and in everyday conversation George talks about seeking out birds' nests as a child under his father's instruction.

It [bird nesting] started with my father about as soon as I could walk. Unfortunately my mother wasn't very well. So he was babysitting me – if he found a nest he would never tell me where it was – only roughly where it was and then I'd have to go and find it. Dad would tell me there was as a blackbird's nest or a chaffinch nest down there and I would find it. I'd find all sorts of nests long-tail-tit, wren, goldcrest, willow warbler all sorts of things. Birds of prey, rooks, crows. We never used to take all the eggs as a kid I only used to take one if I didn't have it. So it [my interest in 'nature']...just developed on from there.

George recounts his specific activities as a child:

I was never interested in sport – we were the second people in our village to have a television and later all the kids were watching television but I wasn't. I was always out. I've been interested in nature all of my life. I was interested in anything flowers, birds anything natural I was interested.

George explains his father and his father's world through reference to a book by one of his favourite authors:

I think like a lot of the old chaps he knew a lot, but didn't say a lot. They were outside all the time and observed things. They observed it [the countryside and 'nature'] but didn't write it down. Except for seven years in the army he [Dad] was a farm worker all of his life.

He continued:

As I said my Mom wasn't very well – so I used to go and pick wildflowers for her a lot. That's not done now thank goodness. My father always used to dig up the first primrose for my mother and bring it home.

Like his father, George, described being outdoors as much as possible observing, 'dwelling' and 'becoming with' (Ingold, 2000) the countryside and 'nature' and, similar to generations of farm workers, George rarely takes to putting his thoughts and observations on paper. However, he does on some occasions use a camera or a GPS to log his wildlife observations.

George's life in the Royal Navy physically distanced him from birds 'I didn't do much [bird watching] in the Navy the opportunity was not there.' However, the Royal Navy's distancing of him from birds appears to have had little lasting effect as:

When I went back on the farm there was nature all round us. I started bird ringing. I got my B [ringing] licence, never my A licence. After I left the Navy I used to do the nest record scheme for the BTO [British Trust for Ornithology] and I used to do on average about 400 nests a year. I'd be likely to make three trips to the nest so you'd find one [a nest] at building – first egg laid – size of clutch – number that survive. That's what they [British Trust for Ornithology] wanted. Unfortunately I had to give up as I got married and worked on most weekends.

George recalls one of the most memorable of his bird nesting experiences: a tree creeper [nest] very low down. It was right down behind the



bark and I used to carry a little dentist mirror for looking down holes and a torch. I shone this torch down into the nest and the female was in there and they [the chicks] were just hatched and I actually saw her pick up the eggshell and tip the young one out and she came up when I was there and [flew] out with the eggshell.

George also recalls finding the nest of a goldcrest:

...they usually build in conifers but this one was in the side of an oak tree and the tree was hollow and I was only [George positioned his thumb and first finger only an inch apart] that far away from her.

In this small quote, George demonstrates the conflict noted by many of my informants between local knowledge and accepted or 'official' knowledge. The accepted knowledge concerning goldcrests is that they build a tiny hammock-like nest in the hanging fronds of conifer trees, not on the side of an oak tree. That George had found a goldcrest nest is not questioned by those that know of his skills as a naturalist. However, if it was not known who the observer was, or if the observation came from a novice naturalist, the veracity of the encounter would arouse questions that could only be answered through detailed drawings, photographs and written descriptive notes that conform to modern ecological methodologies. Such processes are alien to George and impinge on the way he is disposed to engage with the natural world.

George's ways of engaging with the woodland and wildlife of the reserve are embodied to the extent that even when he is pressed to explain his actions he will only say that he likes to 'mooch around' to see what he might see. However in this understatement is the key to explaining how George is disposed to know and engage with the natural world. In his everyday activities he demonstrates, what it is to dwell as Ingold conceptualises it. He 'lives' every moment in his environment by engaging with the natural world about him. During my fieldwork I joined George on a guided wildlife walk. I took photographs of participants during the walk and when I looked closely at the images, I discovered that they effectively demonstrated how George engages with the world around him. He was with a group of people, but was far more engaged with the plants and insects than with the people around him.

George's general and specific habitus appears to be part of an unchallenged continuum. His habitus, unlike those of Bert and Erica, has not been shaped by his entry into professional forestry, or ecological 'fields'. When pressed to express a preference for the way in which he engaged with the reserve or to define a type of 'nature', George resisted defining an activity or category of nature. He simply said that he is happy seeing what he can see. In this way, he demonstrates by his everyday activities what it is to dwell (Ingold, 1993).

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored how staff and volunteers encounter the natural world of the reserve: through their involvement in surveying and monitoring the reserve's dormice and bats, and as they went about their everyday activities. To structure my analysis, I have primarily used Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural fields and Ingold's concept of dwelling to examine the way that my informants perceived and engaged with the woodland and wildlife of the reserve. I further structured my analysis around a dichotomy of science and affect in relation to the natural world, and how social actors engage with the natural world as naturalists or ecologists. These ideal types portray the way that naturalists and ecologists engage with the natural world. The 'ideal' type of naturalist engages affectively, whereas the ecologist engages scientifically. However, neither ideal type appears to exist, although characteristics of the ideal type are displayed in both the naturalist and the ecologist as they engage with the everyday life of the reserve.

Relating my informants' encounters with the natural world to their life trajectories allowed me to demonstrate the value of habitus and cultural fields to this context; that is, the value of using these concepts to consider how the life path of my informants can be used to explain how they perceive and encounter the reserve's woodland and wildlife. To develop an understanding of my informants' attitudes, values and dispositions I examined how conceptualising the habitus as having recognised stages (general and specific) can help to explain how the cultural fields of home, education and employment influence the way my informants perceive and engage with the natural world.

As I analysed my data a number of patterns emerged. The most apparent was the connection between the domestic culture of childhood and the way my informants perceived and engaged with the natural world throughout life. For some, like George, the way he was shown how to engage with the natural world as a child, has remained with him throughout life, whereas for others, such as Bert, the element of the natural world they were introduced to in early life, in his case trees, has become the focus of their education and careers.

As my informants experienced different cultural fields in their progress through life, the way they responded to the cultures of these fields appears to be dependent on their general habitus. My informants mostly entered into cultural fields of education and employment where the attitudes, values and dispositions associated with their general habitus would be at home. However, as in the case of Bill, even when in a cultural field where the attitudes and values of that field appeared to be in harmony, in practice, deviations in attitudes and values between the social actor and that of the cultural field could lead to disenchantment with their chosen career path. However, my informants were often critical of the understanding of the natural world that emerged from the cultural fields they experienced. Criticism of ecological scientific understandings of the natural world was widespread amongst my informants except amongst those having the most scientific of dispositions. It is interesting that although they have followed degree courses related to their interests in the natural world, the younger bat volunteers, are as critical of the way this leads to perceiving and understanding the natural world as are the older, retired volunteers. Both groups are critical of the limited view of the natural world that is currently emerging from a cultural field dominated by the natural sciences because it has limited space for the naturalist's understanding of the natural world that emerges from direct experience. Perhaps the time is ripe for an ecology to emerge that takes note of phenomenological principles and practices.

## Chapter Eight

# Encountering Magic

‘I just find that – well it’s good for the soul’. (Bert)

‘It’s just magical’. (Dot)

In this chapter I examine the woodland and wildlife encounters that my informants find particularly significant, and that are often referred to as ‘magical’ or ‘being good for the soul’. Even for my articulate informants these affective experiences elude further description or explanation. I propose that in these encounters the division between the social actors and the woodland world in which they are immersed dissolve, and they experience a way of being-in-the-world that can be conceptualised as ‘dwelling’. These encounters are, in some senses, the culmination of informants’ experiences of being immersed in the woodland’s material world. In what follows I explore how they can be used to understand a way of being-in-the-world, and how this relates to the general and specific habitus, something I began in Chapter Six. I suggest that affective experiences that are beyond words are shaped by habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and can be understood as a form of existential capital (Nettleton, 2013); furthermore Stebbins’s (2007) idea of fulfilment and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) of flow are also useful in understanding this type of experience.

I argue that my informants’ habitus shapes their way of being-in-the-world, and this in turn shapes their experiences of engaging with the reserve’s woodland. The chapter is in two parts: in the first, I explore informants’ affective magical woodland experiences; in the second, I explore how my informants’ habitus shapes these experiences. In the first part my analysis is guided by Ingold’s concept of dwelling, and his central premise that social actors who dwell in the world ‘do not act *upon* it, or do things *to* it; rather . . . [they] move along *with* it’ (Ingold, 1993 p.164). I argue that a greater understanding of being-in-the-world unfolds if the concept of dwelling, fulfilment and flow are used; thereby allowing for an analysis of momentary as well as long-term forms of immersion in the woodland.

I make my argument in three parts. First I introduce the reader to my informants' magical experiences before considering their experiences of long-term immersion in the woodland. I understand both of these experiences in relation to dwelling and, in addition, I argue that magical experiences represent moments of fulfilment and flow. I then reflect on my own experience of being immersed in the woodland and how this contributed to my 'learning' to dwell, and to feel part and parcel of the woodland (Ingold, 1993). Finally, I consider the contribution of habitus to understanding different ways of dwelling and being-in-the-world.

### Bluebells: 'They have this magic about them' (Erica)

For the staff and volunteers one of the most anticipated and discussed annual events is the carpeting in blue of the reserve's woodland floor. The display is so magnificent that it is impossible for even the most disinterested of visitors not to be aware of the bluebells when they are in full flower. For a short season the staff and volunteers, as they go about their everyday activities, are surrounded by bluebells. The general opinion amongst my informants is that the 'best' place in the reserve for bluebells is Star Wood. My informants sometimes experience an intensity of 'blueness' in a bluebell wood that far exceeds what they expect the colour to be, and this is when the bluebell wood becomes magical. Star Wood is 'special' in that it has the largest population of bluebell plants, and therefore the most flowers to transform the woodland floor. However, for the experience to be magical many overlapping elements must be in place including: the shortness of the flowering season, the time of day, the light that filters through the movement of the trees, the sound of the wind in the trees, and the warm air that releases scent from the flowers.

Another important element is the social context. Such memorable encounters with the woodland often take place when informants are alone. There are, however, exceptions: I experienced bluebells being magically blue when walking in the reserve with Kate. I also experienced the magic of watching a column of nine or ten buzzards circling and calling over the reserve's woodland. In the first case, walking in and sharing the woodland with Kate contributed to the moment, but it was the woodland's materiality rather than the social

interaction that was the most important element of the experience. In the latter case, however, sharing the ‘wow’ factor with others drove the moment to new heights, which was contributed to by our mutual interest in birds. The role of a shared understanding with others who have also ‘known’ the experience is key to Nettleton’s (2013) concept of existential capital. She argues that within the cultural field of fell running, and other similar groups, a form of capital specific to such ‘specialist’ fields exists that is not based on competition but on a shared bodily understanding of the field only available to those immersed in it. Following Nettleton, I suggest that magical moments occur when flow is experienced; the boundaries between my informants and the woodland dissolve, and this can be understood as a field-specific form of existential capital.



Figure 8.1: The Bluebells of Star Wood

For the staff and volunteers bluebells, deer, water, birdsong or snow are often central to magical experiences. However, in addition to the material elements of the encounter, their descriptions often crystallise around a particular moment when the bluebells appear to be particularly blue, the snow is fresh and unmarked by human footprints, or a deer, dormouse or bat is unexpectedly

encountered. Kate reported an unexpected encounter which she experienced one day when walking alone in the reserve. She observed a tableau of a woman walking her horse, a fox and a deer. Kate felt that she and the fox were aware of the deer, the woman and the horse, but the woman was oblivious of Kate, the fox and the deer. What Kate valued was the lack of other social actors' awareness of her presence; neither the fox, the deer, nor the horse was aware, she thought, of her presence, although the deer and fox were aware of each other and of the horse and the woman. She valued being an unobserved observer; she was part and parcel of the woodland, not separate from the world about her but integral to it. In this moment, she was experiencing a central element of what it is to dwell – the dissolving of the ontological distinction between the social and natural worlds. She was also experiencing a moment of flow when she was at one with the woodland.

This is also evident in Dot's account when she identifies other elements that contribute to a particular area of woodland being magical. For twenty years Dot's primary justification for visiting the reserve's woodland was to monitor dormice, which she talks about in an instrumental manner. In contrast, when talking about Valley Wood she talks affectively:

It's a lovely place because of the stream that runs through it and the steep sided valley . . . it's so varied, there are places where it's very wet, there are places where it's relatively dry, there are open places, there is just such a lot of variety – it's just a magical place.

In her comments, Dot identifies a number of elements of the landscape of Valley Wood that contribute to its being magical – there is a stream in a steep valley, open and tree-filled spaces, and wet and dry areas, all of which contribute to Dot finding the woodland enchanting. The activity of surveying and monitoring dormice has been central to her becoming immersed in the woodland, but it is the woodland environment itself that she is affected by and describes as being magical. Those amongst my informants, like Dot and George, who are most respected by the staff and volunteers have terms they use to explain the way they move through the woodland: Dot 'ambles', George 'mooches' and Kate 'potters'. In using these terms they are describing a way of being with the woodland that involves moving along with it rather than acting on it, in other

words, dwelling. Informants who engage with the reserve by moving along with it are easily characterised as dwelling. There are others, such as Nick (Chapter Six) who may from time to time, and only fleetingly, dwell when, in the moment, the instrumentality of their relationship is diminished.

The memorable encounters that my informants describe are constituted in a material, social and cultural context, but the experience inevitably has an affective element that is described by Bert as magical and spiritual. He explains:

In woodland in spring you get the birdsong . . . I just think it's magical particularly the early morning in the spring when the light is just beginning to drift in and the colours change and the atmosphere changes – particularly if there's a bit of mist about – and then the woodland has a particular character all of its own and the birdsong penetrates and I just find that – well it's good for the soul.

Bert here mentions a number of elements that contribute towards his experience: spring, early morning, the time of the year, weather conditions and birdsong. Other informants reported that the river, the wilder or more remote parts of the reserve, open spaces in the woodland, rides, earth banks and small meadows in the woods contribute significantly to their magical encounters. Most importantly, Bert's account draws attention to the affective dimension of the experience: something that is not always encompassed in the notion of flow.

Humberstone (2011), for instance, suggests that flow only captures some elements of such otherworldly experiences. She recognises that a preoccupation with flow limits the development of a deeper understanding of activities, such as fell running and scuba diving where the runners' or divers' engagement with the environment is both physical and spiritual. Nettleton, through her concept of existential capital, attempts to address the 'magical' affective and bodily experiences of fell runners by exploring how they come to embody the Lakeland fells. Like my informants, she finds it difficult to account for what is beyond words, and suggests that such experiences are shared, and most understood by those immersed in the same cultural field. Reflecting on this I realised that as I coppiced, walked, camped and became immersed in the reserve's woodland I began to be affected by a sense of something that was at that stage beyond



words. I would now, rather than talking of the woodland in terms of it being magical, talk of it as having a feeling of ‘ancientness’ that could explain the many references that are made by my informants to the reserve’s woodland being ancient, the continuity of the coppicing cycle, and their shared fascination and concern for the old oak trees and ash stools. In the recurring cycle of woodland life there is a sense of permanence and, for some, a connection with history that contributes to their affective experience of the reserve’s woodland. This resonates with Ingold’s view that people’s connection with history is found in what is ‘sedimented’ in the material landscape through their act of dwelling (Ingold, 1993 p.167).

## Being-in-Woodland

In this section, I explore the magical experiences of my informants who through their activities have become immersed in the reserve’s woodland. I suggest that immersion is central to understanding magical experiences because it takes into account their affective dimension and adds something to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow.

I begin with Jill’s experiences as she has been immersed in Horwood since moving to live only a few metres from the reserve’s boundary in the early 1960s. Jill and her husband have taken part in many of the Trust’s conservation activities and, for the last ten years, monitored the reserve’s dormice. With rarely a day passing without her visiting the woodland Jill has experienced most of the woodland’s seasons and ‘moods’. When interviewed she explained her feeling when she passes through the gate early in the day:

at six o'clock in the morning it's magical. It's like stepping into a different world . . . well it's almost as if you're shutting the door on the outside and you stepped into you know, er, a more philosophical mode, and you can enjoy the actual atmosphere of the place.

Jill here is describing flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). She is leaving the everyday world for one with a different atmosphere that changes her mode of being to a more philosophical one; the only word she has to explain this atmosphere is, however, ‘magical’. Taking a lead from Nettleton, and having shared the experience of being immersed in the woodland and experiencing its

magic myself, I would suggest that its ‘ancientness’ is a major element of Jill’s and my own affective experience.

Affect is also an important element in Jill’s experience of monitoring dormice. In Chapter Seven I discussed joining Jill on a surveying and monitoring expedition in the woods, and described how she engaged not only with the dormice but also with the woodland. From sharing that experience with her I saw her engagement with woodland and wildlife differently; she engaged not as someone preoccupied with the scientific monitoring of dormice but as someone affecting and being affected by the woodland life about her. In this we can see elements of what Ingold characterises as dwelling; in the way Jill engages with the woodland she appeared to become with and move along with the woodland rather than counting its wildlife for instrumental reasons.

Erica’s account also highlights the importance of affect in understanding what it is to become with and dwell. She explains how she engages with the woodland and wildlife:

My love . . . [of the reserve] goes back for years. We used to play in the stream [Erica and her children] looking at little bugs and beetles. It’s a very, very special place because it’s silent, peaceful and it just encompasses you with a sort of serenity. So if you’re ever fed up and when I feel fed up I come here and feel one hundred per cent better and it’s so unspoiled I just love it. Everything here, the wildlife, you see deer, you see squirrels, I’ve seen little water shrews . . . it’s just a magic place.

The reserve was a playground for her children where she was able to introduce them to ‘little bugs’. It was part of family life, where she was able to share her fascination for microscopic species with her children. As a child Erica was fascinated with small things, and I quote from her interview transcript, ‘From my early days, from my tiny tot days, I was always . . . looking at little tiny insects.’ Her fascination with the microscopic continued into later life when she studied microbiology and ecology at university. The serenity, the silence, peace and the unspoiled woodland of the reserve are elements that contribute to Erica’s dwelling. In dwelling she is affectively ‘becoming with’ the woodland

life of the reserve in a way that is different to the way that is expected of someone trained in the science of microbiology and ecology. She is encompassed by the serenity of the woodland and her whole mood is transformed by it. Below she describes what affects her in the woodland:

I love water – I am a water person . . . I just love water – I love listening to the change in the different tunes that water makes all through the year – when we have floods. . . . I watch the river change – I watch it drying out and I watch it in full flood and when it's snowing. When we were doing some of the tree surveying, which was fairly boring – I'd be looking at the mosses and I'd look at the little tiny fruiting bodies – beautiful, and I'd listen to the birds so it's the whole feel really – it's being outside in the fresh air.

I found in this description a reflection of what I observed of Jill's interaction with the woodland when she was monitoring dormice; that is, an appreciation of 'the whole feel' of the reserve's woodland. Having a 'whole feel' for the woodland for Erica involves a strong affective connection to it and its inhabitants. This is shown in the following description:

we saw this beetle . . . and he looked as if he had got his three kings uniform on, he had bronze wings with lots of little whiskers down the side and a little gold beautiful, collar and I thought wow – and I can see it now I was so spellbound – I thought this is just amazing – it's the little things that amaze me because most of the time you don't notice them you just don't see them – so I'll just sit and watch some little ants or some bugs crawling around the place for absolutely hours sometimes.

The woodland vouchsafes its serenity to Erica and affects her mode of being-in-the-world. Erica is an informant that I characterise as dwelling, a characterisation that is supported by her being transformed by the woodland and becoming part of it.

For her, being in the woods is spellbinding. I suggest that Erica is experiencing more than flow because she is drawn into the beetles' world and is engaging with them. Being lost in their domain, she is not only escaping her everyday world, as the concept of flow implies, but is also moving along with them in

their world. In Ingold's terms she is part of the woodland world in her moments with the beetles and is, for a time, dwelling.

The significance of the relationship between magical experiences and immersion became apparent during my fieldwork when I became immersed in the reserve's woodland and experienced several events that I can only describe as magical. These occurred after I had spent many daylight hours wandering through the woodland and camping overnight, or when I took part in surveying bats and nightingales night after night for several weeks. Indeed, the idea of immersion is I find more useful than that of flow in capturing the affective dimension of magical experiences.

The importance of the idea and experience of immersion to dwelling is also evident in Sid's experience of the reserve at night. Surveying and monitoring bats from dusk till dawn immersed him in a specific woodland materiality. Through his activities, Sid experiences and understands the existence of many different shades of 'night'.

I prefer dusk and dawn. The dead of the night – um, you know. I feel . . . reasonably at ease [at night] but there is at the back of your mind [things] you can't see. It's that sort of primordial fear of the dark and I don't think I'm immune to that by any means.

Sid's statement 'It's that sort of primordial fear of the dark' demonstrates how becoming immersed in the woodland through conservation activities leads to an engagement with the world at a fundamental affective level. In acknowledging a fear of the dark Sid is presenting an example of a social actor no longer controlling their environment but moving along with the material things you can 'see' but also with things 'you can't see'. I can relate to his 'primordial fear' as I have 'shared [the same] passions within the field' (Nettleton 2013 p.196; and see also, Wacquant 2004), and in the next section I explore my experience autoethnographically in order to shed light on how experiences that are 'beyond words' can be understood.

## Learning to Dwell

Taking an autoethnographic approach enables me to address the question of

what it is to experience the magic of the reserve's woodland. In the following I explore how I was immersed in the woodland through camping in it at night, how I became with the wild service trees of the woodland in the morning mist and came to dwelling, at least for a short while, in the woodland early one misty morning.

During my life I have seen many rare birds, butterflies and wildflowers, and beautiful landscapes, but have rarely felt a part of them. I have been a spectator, seeing many things and experiencing them superficially but rarely having a sense of belonging. I have realised that I am ambivalent to belonging. I want to belong but in most social situations when I find that I belong I feel uncomfortable. When working-class I desired to be middle-class, when engaged in ornamental horticulture I was dissatisfied and became involved in commercial horticulture, and in academia, then when I had the prospect of becoming a sociologist, being an anthropologist appeared to be a more attractive way of understanding the world. In the past I have seen myself as being driven by dissatisfaction. However, I had not appreciated that what I was dissatisfied with was not the world about me but my way of being-in-the-world. I was a spectator rather than a part of the world. My fieldwork experience changed this.

During my fieldwork I had a number of encounters in the reserve that transformed my understanding of my relationship with the world about me. These encounters, together with my observation of the ways others engaged with the reserve's woodland and wildlife, enabled me to experience the reserve's woodland and wildlife in a way that was new to me. I can now understand this experience in terms of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), fulfilment (Stebbins, 2007; 2010), dwelling (Ingold, 1993) and existential capital (Nettleton, 2013). Before my fieldwork I had always felt a disjunction between myself and my material environment and, particularly, the world of 'nature' that I sought to engage with. I was on a fool's errand for although I knew I was fascinated by 'nature' I failed to appreciate that what I was seeking was the feeling of being a part of it. As I write this I am by necessity at my computer rather than in the woods of Horwood. A sad state of affairs but made less painful, and now bearable, as I can hear a robin trilling its winter song,

reminding me that when I am able to return to Horwood and enter the woods I will find myself embraced by them. I no longer visit Horwood instrumentally to seek out and observe its flora and fauna, rather I go along with whatever experiences the woods have to offer me and even revel in simply being in the woodland. I'm learning to move along with the woodland by mooching; I am 'dynamically linked under transformation within the movement of becoming of the world as a whole' (Ingold, 1993 p.168).

When I now return to my field notes, I am able to appreciate how confused I was about my relationship with woodland:

[my wife] in the morning was very opposed to me spending the night in the woods as she would worry for my safety. I worry about my safety even though I know it's an irrational fear. The woman owner of the Rhodesian ridgeback dog that I encountered through the flap of my tent said 'How brave you are. I could never spend a night alone in these woods.' During the night I have to constantly control my irrational fears and thoughts. There is no real danger in the woods. Why do I anticipate it? Perhaps it's because sounds in the quiet of the night are so amplified. A falling leaf sounds like a man walking in the grass. A twig snapping is a rifle shot and the bark of the muntjac deer is primaeval and is so close that it appears to be in the tent.

After such a night I had one of the most memorable fieldwork experiences. On 10th October 2010 in my field notes I wrote about the dawn:

I made camp on the north side of the river between the two bridges. The most magical time was a few minutes into the morning as colour returned to the wood. When I unzipped my tent after a cold and uncomfortable night the wood was glowing with the amber of the wild service tree.

Later I wrote:

Forget the fruitless chase for nature experiences. Going looking in the right place. The wild service is hard to find. When my wife and myself went looking, on our visit to the woods many years ago, we

failed to find any specimens, and even now with my greater knowledge of the woods they are hard to ‘see’.

On reflection, my encounter with the autumn colours of the wild service trees was an accumulation of events and experiences that was changed by the dawn light and my overnight immersion in the woodland on the banks of the river. For me what contributed to the magic of those few moments was that in my soul I felt that I was part of the wild service trees’ world. I was experiencing the feeling of being part and parcel of the woods; I was dwelling in the woodland rather than passing through. I came to realise that by immersing myself in the woodland, I became for a time, so engaged with it that my everyday life outside of the reserve was left behind. This experience is for Csikszentmihalyi (1990) a central criterion of flow, and a culminating experience that emerges from engagement in serious leisure pursuits (Stebbins, 2007). The idea of immersion, however, captures the affective and spiritual dimension of these experiences that are beyond words.

In the next section I move away from spiritual and magical experiences to seek a fuller explanation of how the experience of becoming immersed in woodland is related to biographies, and how the concept of habitus can help us unpack this relationship.

## Being-in-the-World, Habitus and Dwelling

In the previous section, I discussed my informants’ relationship with woodland using what they often describe as magical encounters to highlight their affective engagement with it. In what follows I examine the relationship between the way my informants engage with the reserve’s woodland and wildlife including their habitus and, in particular, investigate how a woodland habitus is associated with dwelling.

In Chapter Six I characterised my informants as engaging with the reserve in ways that can be described as instrumental and also in terms of ‘becoming with’ and dwelling; with a distinction being made between those who experience dwelling fleetingly and those who dwell as a way of being-in-the-world. Discussions of spirituality or magic were absent in the data I collected from

those with an instrumental mode of engaging with the woodland. Not all of those informants characterised in some way as dwelling talked of the woodland in spiritual or magical terms, although those that did not talk of magic were inclined to talk about their experiences in affective terms. George is an exception. Of all of my informants he is the one who can be most closely identified in terms of Ingold's characterisation of dwelling. He is the only one who has, from infancy, experienced a cultural field defined by physical engagement with the outdoors, countryside, woodland and wildlife. George, it can be argued, is not seeking the magic of another world as his world is already a world of magic. Here I would refer my reader to Chapter Seven where George talks of finding a tree creeper's nest, not in terms of spirituality or magic but in the delight he finds in the world he is a part of. Here I attempt to link these different ways of engaging with the reserve to habitus.

I begin with the proposition that habitus is both shaped by the cultural fields within which social actors find themselves, and that the actions of social actors in these cultural fields are shaped by their habitus. From this standpoint, I argue that my informants' immersion in woodland and their 'becoming with' and dwelling are related to the cultural fields of childhood (general habitus) and professional life (specific habitus). I look at these in turn.

The experience that all of my informants thirst for, is to be in the outdoors. They demonstrate this by participating in the everyday life of the reserve and by confirming, when interviewed, the importance of spending time in the outdoors. With rare exceptions, all of my informants refer to playing in the outdoors as children. Introduction to the outdoors by family members often involves the particular natural history interest of that family member. For some of my informants this initial natural history focus remains with them throughout their lives, and conforms to Bourdieu's view that dispositions of a person's general habitus remain influential.

Most of my informants, as we have seen, were older, educated, white, middle-class individuals who had experienced educational and employment cultural fields governed by rationality. George and Dom are the only informants who do



not fit this general characterisation. George was from a rural working-class family, left school at fifteen, and remained within a rural cultural field throughout his life except when he was a submariner and experienced the cultural field of the navy. Dom was from an industrial urban working-class culture.



Figure 8.2: George's World

A common theme of my informants' biographies is that most were introduced to the outdoors and wildlife in childhood by family members, and that they were exposed to a domestic culture that, if not passionate about the countryside and wildlife, had some degree of awareness of countryside practices, its flora and fauna and the ways that they can be engaged with. These early experiences contribute substantially to the way they engage with the reserve's woodland and wildlife and their way of being-in-the-world, although there is often a disjunction between their general and specific habitus. Bert, for instance, became familiar with trees as a child and they retain their importance for him. His father introduced him to trees by visiting parks and woodland and his uncle, who was a forestry worker, showed him, during school holidays, the ways foresters work with trees. A domestic cultural field where trees were important shaped his general habitus and this habitus, in turn, shaped his entry into the cultural fields of education and employment giving rise to his specific habitus. Despite becoming a professional forester however, the affective bond with trees

that first developed in his childhood has re-emerged in retirement.

Trees have been the material thread running through Bert's life, but even though trees have framed his life, in the following we can see him explaining that his affective bond is with more than trees:

I love the spring it will always be my favourite season and a spring in ancient woodland I think is very, very special – so springtime in [Horwood] is a very magical time – I like going to parts of the woods where the wildflowers are particularly good . . . but increasingly I just go for long walks and finding new corners that I have not really been to before or appreciated. I am particularly interested in birds and increasingly in the wild flora – the wildflowers – and I'm also developing an interest in butterflies and moths. I have no great expertise in them but I am learning more. And of course I have to say trees. I particularly like ancient trees. Trees in ancient woodland generally provide the framework for everything else.

Bert refers here to his other interests, but trees and woodland provide the context of the experience. However, like the others who are immersed in the woodland he has a particular way of going along with the woodland by taking 'long walks'; this is not such an evocative term as mooching and ambling used by others, but it still highlights a way of being in the woodland that is associated with a non-instrumental moving through and dwelling in the woodland.

Trees and forests continued to be part of his life when he took a university degree in forestry and entered a career in this field. Bert spent all of his working life in forestry and rose to become a senior executive in the Forestry Commission. To achieve this we should assume he knew how to play the game and acquired a habitus specific to that field. However, as can be seen from the above quote, he has maintained the capacity to be captivated by the magic of spring and, even if only momentarily, can 'shed' his specific habitus for that of the cultural field that shaped his general habitus during childhood. Bert 'becomes with' the early morning in spring but it is the particular woodland context that frames his affective response to colours, birdsong, and mist. And

even though his education and career have been in cultural fields dominated by science and economics his affective response to the natural world, to which he was introduced as a child and which shaped his general habitus, has remained.

Tim is another informant who now walks in the woodland after many years using the reserve's woodland as a training site for long distance running. It was a backdrop for physical exercise and training, however, he now runs to the reserve and slows to a walk once he is in it in order to sense and experience the woodland and its wildlife. He no longer sees the reserve's woodland as a training site, and his experience of listening to birdsong has transformed his way of being in the woodland to one of 'becoming with' and, on occasion, dwelling. In childhood, he was taken walking by his father, on the moorland of north-east England, who was an enthusiastic follower of those who hunt and shoot wild birds and animals. He was not sympathetic to the attitudes and values of social actors of this cultural field, and following this, his specific habitus was shaped in a cultural field where wildlife had little significance. However, when he became a coppicer the similarities between the dispositions and values of his general habitus and the reserve's cultural fields emerged, and he found himself at 'home' in the reserves woodland where his interest in woodland and wildlife was reawakened.

I now return to an informant who has remained affectively attached throughout her life to elements of the natural world she first encountered to as a child. The scientific ecological field, as the reader may recall from Chapter Seven, shaped Erica's specific habitus and when working in the field of ecology she conformed to the rules of the game and assumed the conventions of a professional ecologist. However, her affective attachment to the natural world emerged when I interviewed her at the point when she was entering post-employment life. This constancy and persistence of her general habitus throughout life is highlighted by her continuing fascination with microscopic wildlife. Bourdieu anticipates this persistence in his theory of practice, although it raises problems for conceptualising habitus as existing in recognisable stages as was proposed in the ideas of a general and specific habitus. However, rather than thinking of the general and specific as linear stages of habitus it may be

more useful to consider habitus as being constituted from layers of experience in cultural fields that may emerge into significance in different contexts and at different stages of life.

Unlike Bert and Erica the cultural fields that shaped George's specific habitus were very similar to those that shaped his general habitus, and there was no disjunction between the two. He was introduced to finding birds' nests when he was a very small child and has continued using the skills he acquired while growing up. He tells us of his father's wildlife knowledge, and how his father introduced him to wildlife:

like a lot of the old chaps he knew a lot, but didn't say a lot. They were outside all the time and observed things. He was a farm worker all of his life.

George, as was his father, is outside all of the time observing things and of all of my informants is the most habituated to observing the natural history that surrounds him. He will point out nests that others pass by. He finds them by engaging with the woodland using skills that became embodied during childhood; this conforms to Bourdieu's understanding of childhood socialisation as being enduring. George has encountered other cultural fields, but if he found that the attitude and values of these fields differed from his own he would not engage actively with them. An example of this, was when he withdrew from engaging with the system of recording birds that is observed by birdwatchers in the County, and refused to follow the formalised reporting system required to register the sighting of a rare bird he had encountered (see Chapter Five).

The attitudes and values of the rural cultural field of George's childhood have shaped the way he has engaged with the countryside and woodland throughout his life, and leads me to characterise him as having a woodland habitus. This way of engaging with the material world was different from that of my other informants and can be explained by the different cultural fields they inhabited in childhood.

For most of my informants it is possible to identify instrumental purpose in their engagement with the reserve and its wildlife. They may have a passion for

conserving species, creating lists, recording sightings, or honing their identification skills of the birds, bats or butterflies they encounter. I have observed George also acting in such ways, nevertheless, the ‘game and its rules’ of the cultural field of his childhood shaped a general habitus that is associated with dwelling. George does not act upon the world about him by doing things to it, he moves along with it and *is part and parcel* of it; this is a way of being-in-the-world that my other informants can only aspire to.

As we saw earlier, another of my informants whose immersion in the reserve’s woodland can also be understood as dwelling, and who also experienced a similar continuity between their general and specific habitus was Dot. She described a supportive school environment, so different from Dom’s and my own, and we can see how it predisposed her to engaging with wild flowers:

In the junior school we used to go for nature walks. When I was in the first year of the senior school one of the things we had to do was make a flower diary. Of course you couldn't do it nowadays but I've still got bits of it . . . I'm a bit competitive and I was determined to get more flowers than anyone else. We pressed these flowers and I got ever so many and I learnt the Latin names as well as the English names.

She maintained her interest in the outdoors through her university studies, and in her teaching career when she taught geography and ecology. Shaped by the cultural field of education, no disjunction was created between her general and specific habitus for, although she taught ecology, she was not a professional ecologist and was able to take a less rationalist approach to her teaching. She has been a member of the Trust for twenty-five years and for twenty of those has monitored dormice in Valley Wood. She is affectionately known as ‘Dormouse Dot’. This title recognises not only the contribution she has made to the scientific knowledge and understanding of dormice but also the way she has immersed herself in Valley Wood. She does this by ‘ambling’ about, and finds fulfilment in seeing only one or two dormice a year even after spending one day a week from April to October monitoring them. I would argue that in referring to her as Dormouse Dot and George as a ‘countryman’ my informants recognise the field-specific cultural capital highlighted by Nettleton’s concept of

‘existential capital’. I would further argue, that my informants recognise the way that particular social actors, such as Dot and George, dwell in the woodland, and that their dwelling is facilitated by their general habitus.

For another group, the origins of their interest in the woodland cannot be located in their general habitus. Sid, Dom and myself were, unlike most of my informants, from urban, working-class cultures bereft of any interest in or access to woodland and wildlife. We experienced urban cultural fields in childhood where an understanding of the countryside and wildlife was not part of the culture we inhabited. We were rarely mentored by wildlife and countryside enthusiasts and had to forge our own engagement with the natural world. Sid, who we met earlier, trained as an ecologist and now works as an independent ecological consultant providing ecological data required by the statutory planning process of England. Like Erica and Dot, Sid immersed himself in the reserve’s woodland through surveying and monitoring wildlife. However, unlike Erica and Dot, who began to engage with wildlife in childhood, he took some time to discover wildlife. When talking about his early life he explained that he could not relate to the activities and interests of his contemporaries. He mentioned football in this context, and how he saw it as a pointless activity and that he was unhappy with the compromises he had to make to participate in the activities of his peers. He explained that it was only when he became interested in wildlife that he found activities (a game) and other individuals (players) to whom he could relate.

Sid stands apart from the others who survey and monitor the reserve’s wildlife in that he primarily engages with the reserve at night. Sid and myself are unusual in that we have spent time in the reserve alone at night, although our reasons for doing this are very different. Mine relate to the needs of my fieldwork whereas Sid explained that he had a desire to ‘escape’ human society and find solitude. Sid related, ‘I like projects that involve . . . isolation and being away from the majority of people – being out and about when most people are in bed’. There was a long pause and then he continued, ‘I wouldn’t go as far to say I’m a sociopath – I would rather be in woods at night than in a city at night’.

Sid rationalises his relationship with the woodland, night-time, and bats and other species when he says, 'I wouldn't say I was completely nocturnal. If I didn't have any bat work to do let's say I . . . I would keep myself busy with birds – easy I'd just do project work on birds because there's no bats – sort of thing'. His interest in the reserve is therefore not restricted to bats. He values the solitude of the reserve at night which monitoring bats allows him to experience. However, he also values the woodland for its picturesque qualities, the wild flowers and as a place in which he can engage his fascination with the natural world. He said, 'I like Carpenters and The Great Trench – they're quite interesting habitats, they're quite picturesque'.

From spending many hours surveying and monitoring bats with Sid, I understand that he prefers spending time in the woodland at night rather than in the day, as it provides him with the solitude he is seeking. However although he is instrumentally seeking to escape from people by being in the woodland at night, by moving with it rather than acting on it, he comes to dwell. Unlike those whose general habitus predisposes them to engage with 'nature', Sid's way of being in the woodland is shaped by his specific habitus; like them, however, he is transformed by the woodland and comes to dwell rather than engaging with it instrumentally.

Similar to Sid, neither Dom nor I developed a general habitus that predisposed us to engage with the natural world. We shared similar working-class cultural backgrounds in childhood where an appreciation and familiarity with wildlife was limited. The cultural fields of our childhoods, contrast strongly with that experienced by George whose childhood was steeped in the natural world of his rural environment. Our childhood engagement with the natural world was limited by our urban industrial culture and environment. When interviewed, Dom was asked about his family and early life in order to establish this social and cultural background, and to discover when and how he became interested in natural history and wildlife. His response was particularly interesting. Like many of my informants, he reported:

from a kid I was always . . . out playing . . . I was never indoors – all

of my summer holidays I would go out in the morning then I came back for my lunch . . . and I came back from my dinner and then we'd be back at the playing fields. That was playing sport mainly.

As I have shown, playing or being outdoors, as a child, was an experience that most of my informants shared, and childhood was the stage in life at which most became aware of the natural world around them. However, while many of my informants experienced as children a rich culture of wildlife and natural history, which shaped their habitus, Dom's and my own family cultures did not provide this. Dom explained:

Mum had no interest in the outdoors or anything like that. She is scared to death of a fly or wasp. And my dad was into martial arts and sport and he used to teach martial arts.

The natural world poverty of our childhood changed little on our entry into the cultural field of education. As Dom explains, when he was at school there was an incident with a bat with the adults around him being at a loss over what to do when a bat was found in a classroom.

I was sat in the classroom and Mrs Siskin who was the deputy head came into the classroom and said in a very posh voice, "Can Master Smith join me please." and I thought oh my God, I thought I'd done something terrible. And they dragged me out of the classroom and said that there is a bat in the school canteen. All of the dinner ladies were screaming and panicking and she said I was to rescue this bat but it was more like rescuing the dinner ladies.

Thus began Dom's fascination with bats which has stayed with him all of his life:

I will go anywhere and do anything to see bats and gain knowledge and experience. When I was training I would travel all over the UK helping people with projects and learning. I have set up a project in Bermuda working with people and bats.

In justifying his obsession with bats he explained:

I have empathy towards lots of sorts of animals but I have no interest at all in studying them looking at them or anything . . . other species just don't do it for me it's pure bats which is a bit – people keep



telling me it's a bit sad and that I should branch out a little bit more but I'm looking at bats all over the world and I'm interested in all bats and I spend all of my time looking into bat species all over the place.

Dom's involvement with the reserve is solely concerned with bats and his single-minded fixation with bats may relate, like my own which I discuss below, to the cultural fields of our childhoods where the natural world was viewed as having no significance to everyday urban culture. Unlike George, we were not immersed in a culture that valued the natural world but had to find our own way of engaging with wildlife, in Dom's case bats or flowering plants and birds in mine.

Dom's engagement with the reserve and his experiences and encounters with its bats appear to share many parallels with my own experience. Although Dom has a great enthusiasm for bats, his social background did not provide him with the habitus required to engage with the natural world. He expressed his discomfort about his obsession with bats when he said, 'It's a bit sad. I should branch out a little bit more'. It is possible to speculate that if he and I had as children experienced cultural fields where the natural world was valued, we may have found our interest in natural history encouraged and the way we engage with the natural world might have been different.

Like Dom, I had to find my own way of engaging with the natural world without the support of a family or school culture that valued it or attributed any value to a knowledge and understanding of it. For most of my life I have been a wildlife spectator looking at wildlife but without engaging with it in any meaningful way. My limited form of engagement with the natural world I attribute to my lack of access to cultural capital during childhood, early education and a general habitus which was not shaped by an early engagement with plants and animals. At secondary modern school we had access to a library where I found a textbook with a green cover. I remember it had ecology in the title, but what had drawn me to the book were the line drawings of cross sections of a pond showing the plants and animals that live in ponds. I was

fascinated and took it to the teacher acting as librarian who, as he date stamped it said, ‘You won’t understand this’. This was the school’s expectation of me as a working-class kid who was not a very good reader, however, I speculate that if I had experienced either George’s rural childhood culture or the middle-class domestic or educational culture of many of my informants, my habitus and the way I engage with the natural world would have been very different. Nevertheless, experiencing the cultural field of the reserve through my fieldwork has allowed me access to the cultural capital so lacking in my childhood to the extent that the way in which I inhabit the world has changed.

As I have analysed my fieldwork and interview data I have observed that my informants engage practically with the reserve in many different ways, and that these different ways of engaging with the reserve can be understood in terms of stages of habitus that are linked to the cultural fields they have encountered during their trajectory through life. Bourdieu (1977), Desmond (2007) and Wacquant (2004; 2014a; 2014b; 2015) argue that early socialisation and the general habitus that emerges at this point is significant throughout life. To some extent all my informants are predisposed toward wildlife and, in many cases, this is the consequence of childhood socialisation in a culture that values the outdoors, wildlife and natural history which becomes embodied in their habitus.

To illustrate this point I want to return to George, as he exemplifies a dwelling relationship with the woodland, which is recognised by the other volunteers. As we have seen, as a child George was introduced into a particularly rural way of engaging with wildlife and natural history by his farmworker father, and has continued to engage with wildlife in this way throughout his life. His engagement with the reserve’s woodland and wildlife is very different from the way all of my other informants engage with it. He is distinguished from the other staff and volunteers by his woodland habitus, and the cultural and symbolic capital that are associated with it. Within Bourdieuan cultural fields, the status of capital is negotiated between players and establishes its value. The present ‘game’ of wildlife conservation as played out within the reserve is framed within a scientific paradigm that is dominated by the concepts of ecology and ecologists. George is not a trained scientist or ecologist and his

engagement with the woodland and wildlife of the reserve is often idiosyncratic and emotional. Knowledge gained from affective encounters with the reserve's woodland and wildlife carries little weight in the negotiation of how the reserve is managed. In fact, it is held in low esteem in a cultural field of wildlife conservation dominated by scientific ecology. However, in the wider social network of the reserve the fact that George's intrinsic knowledge was won through his lifelong engagement with the outdoors and wildlife is attributed symbolic capital. George does not appreciate the symbolic capital he holds, or even appreciate that he holds such power, but it is demonstrated when others value his intrinsic knowledge of the reserve over scientifically acquired ecological knowledge. Many of my informants, although they have followed life trajectories that have engaged them with cultural fields where rationality was the defining value, still observe that the way George engages with the reserve results in the knowledge that is different from rational ecological knowledge but is no less valuable. In fact they value it more highly in a way that is analogous to their valuing of hand tools over the chainsaw.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I examined encounters with woodland materiality that had for my informants affective and spiritual connotations. These events that have much to say about their relationship with the reserve were hard to explain even for my articulate informants. Terms such as magical and being good for the soul were their only recourse for conveying to others what 'other worldly' experience meant to them. To aid my analysis I explored my informants' experiences in terms of dwelling, fulfilment and flow, and showed how their experiences were shaped by habitus and could be understood in terms of existential capital. The latter drew me to foreground autoethnographically my own beyond-words experiences as a way of explaining the 'shared passions' of the field (Nettleton 2013).

Taking an autoethnographic approach and treating my own experiences as valid data worthy of analysis, has contributed substantially to my understanding of and ability to explain my data. In particular, by following in the footsteps of those of my informants who dwell in the woodland by camping and mooching I

also became immersed in the woodland. I experienced its magic, was transformed by it and experienced what it is to become with and dwell. This approach, although creating a partial account and possibly not testing fully my informants' ability to explain their experiences, suggests that their knowing that I had shared the passions of the field with them meant that they expected me to 'know' what they meant when they talked of magical experiences. This supports Nettleton's (2013 p.206) proposal that 'the experience is so deeply personal, it can only be shared and appreciated by others who have done it,' a refrain that also runs throughout Wacquant's (2004) study of boxing.

Conceptualising the affective and spiritual dimensions of my informants' magical experiences as moments of flow and fulfilment drew attention to how my informants were rewarded with the experience of being transported to another world. However, understanding magical experiences in terms of immersion and dwelling was found to be more helpful as the non-dualistic focus of dwelling fosters openness to examining the affective and spiritual dimensions of magical experiences.

From my analysis it has emerged that the way my informants were disposed to engage with woodland and wildlife was shaped by their general and specific habitus, and that the cultural fields they inhabited shaped their habitus. In consequence, some of my informants engaged instrumentally with the woodland whereas others' way of being-in-the-woodland was more akin to what Ingold conceptualises as dwelling. I have also shown that informants' ways of being-in-the-world was often inconsistent, and that they could be characterised as sometimes dwelling. This happens when, through immersion in the woodland they were transformed by it and came to move along with it rather than acting on it which gave rise to an experience of being part and parcel of the woodland.

Those informants who are characterised as dwelling or, more accurately, fleetingly or sometimes dwelling exhibit a tension between their general habitus, which is associated with an affective way of being-in-the-world, and their specific habits which aligns with a more instrumental way of being-in-the-world. In turn this means that they do not fully meet the criterion of dwelling as

a non-dualist way of being-in-the-world. These informants are those who talk in affective terms of their woodland experiences. In contrast, George sees no distinction between the woodland world and himself and does not use such language, although he finds delight in discovering a goldcrest or tree creeper's nest. Of all my informants, George's way of being-in-the-world was found to most closely conform to Ingold's concept of dwelling. His general and specific habitus are indistinguishable, giving rise to a woodland habitus which facilitates his dwelling.

## Chapter Nine

### Conclusion

In this chapter I draw together the empirical and conceptual threads of my ethnographic study, reflect on the research process, outline my contribution to knowledge and consider the limitations of my research. I begin by reminding the reader of my research aims and my analytical and methodological approach before moving to consider my findings, which I discuss in relation to my research questions.

#### Research Aims and Analytical Approach

The aim of my research has been to make visible the everyday life of a woodland nature reserve. This is a world where human and nonhuman lives intersect and become entangled. I have advanced this aim through exploring the activities of the social actors involved as they participate in the conservation practices of the reserve, and by exploring the meaning that engagement with the reserve has for them. I focus on elements of the everyday life of the reserve that the staff and volunteers find to be particularly significant. Of particular importance are the social interactions they experience and the encounters with the nonhuman which participation in their everyday tasks make possible. These elements however, do not operate independently but coalesce into a complex entanglement of lives, events, and encounters, which contribute to the meaning that involvement in the everyday life of the reserve has for those who participate in its mundane activities.

Another of my aims has been to bring to the attention of those outside of the wildlife conservation and environmental cultural fields the complexity of the social-natural relationships to be found within a nature reserve and, particularly, to highlight the importance that the natural world context has for the social actors involved. I also have a more political aim, which is to bring to the attention of those who are interested in rebalancing the human-nonhuman relationship evidence of a way of engaging with the natural world that suggests a less anthropocentric approach. Such an approach can be observed amongst the

staff and volunteers who engage with the reserve's woodland and wildlife by 'mooching', 'ambling' and 'pottering'. A final aim, as I explained in the Introduction, was to follow my longstanding fascination with 'nature' and try to understand my, hitherto, less than satisfactory relationship with the natural world.

What has emerged from my research is a series of key findings. I outline them here before discussing how I have answered my research questions. To order my discussion I consider my findings as they relate, on the one hand, to participation in the everyday life of the reserve and, on the other hand, to the meaning that the woodland and wildlife of the reserve has for my informants. Nevertheless, we must remain aware of the problems of such a dualistic approach. The experiences of participation and the meanings that the social-natural world of the reserve has for the staff and volunteers are inseparable.

I discovered in the early stages of my research, that if I based my approach solely on untangling the mess of intersecting lives by using one theoretical framework I would fail to understand and portray the richness of the interactions that occur between the reserve and its humans. I found that three authors developed concepts that could be interpreted in ways which would help me to examine the features of the everyday life of the reserve that I was interested in, and to understand the complexity of the research setting. These concepts were Bourdieu's (1977) *habitus*, Ingold's (1993) *dwelling* and Despret (2004) and Haraway's (2008) notion of 'becoming with'. I found these to be valuable tools for exploring the relationships that occur when human and nonhuman worlds intersect, as they opened up a range of avenues of investigation necessary for untangling the complexities of relations within the reserve. In addition, I incorporated the concepts of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), fulfilment (Stebbins, 2007) and existential capital (Nettleton, 2013) derived from the serious leisure literature. They have all contributed to the analytical framework that I developed to address my research questions.

As the reader will recall, in my introduction, I quote Leopold's (1966: ix) well known phrase: 'There are some who can live without wild things and some who

cannot', and in Chapter Seven Bert referred to the woodland of the reserve as being 'good for the soul'. These two statements identify something which all of my findings relate to: the need to engage with 'wild things' or, as I interpret it, the woodland's materiality, and to engage with things that are good for the 'soul', thereby achieving the 'sense of fulfilment' (Stebbins, 2007) that Tim (Chapter Six) feels after a day's coppicing.

In what follows, I first discuss what I have found out about how my informants' involvement in the everyday life of the reserve brings them into contact with the natural world, and what they find fulfilling at the most general of levels, before unpacking these generalities to explore the specifics of my findings in relation to my research questions.

### Initial Findings

At the most general of levels, all of my informants participate regularly in the conservation practices of the reserve in order to engage with the outdoors, to give something back to society by physically 'caring' for the reserve, and to follow, to a greater or lesser degree, an interest in the natural world. These three key findings became apparent in the early stages of my fieldwork but only provide a superficial explanation of the everyday life of the reserve. Furthermore, although there are many reasons for being involved in the everyday life of the reserve, such as commitment to an outdoor activity or following an interest in butterflies, what is most important to the staff and volunteers is that they can participate in these activities and pursue their interests within a community of like-minded others who share, to a great extent, their attitudes, values and dispositions.

Being outdoors is a central reason for being involved in the everyday life of the reserve. The importance of the outdoors to involvement, however, is such a part of my informants' habitus that they are not cognisant of their habituation to the outdoor environment, and rarely specify it when explaining the reasons for engaging in their daily activities. In a similar way, contributing to the wellbeing of the 'environment' – the act of giving something back to society – is also a common reason given by informants as to why they volunteer. However, this is



so fundamental to who they are that it is simply taken for granted; it is the way they are disposed to behave. The cultural field of the reserve is a social environment in which the habitus of the individual staff and volunteers are at home. Being outdoors and ‘caring’ for the environment are important motivational factors for the staff and volunteers. However, as I have shown in my analytical chapters, their participation in practices that constitute the everyday life of the reserve, involve more than being in the outdoors and making a contribution to society by caring for the environment.

Stimulated by these early findings, I inquired of my informants what factors encouraged their interest in nature and the outdoors. Most of the staff and volunteers reported that their initial interest emerged from early childhood encounters with the outdoors and plants and animals. They also confirmed that, regardless of whether or not they had subsequently experienced other cultural fields, an interest in the natural world and the outdoors had been maintained throughout their lives. Although Sid’s focus shifted from birds to bats, while George’s interest in birds and Dom’s in bats were unchanged, maintaining an interest in plants and animals that had been established in childhood was the most common pattern.

These initial findings show that practical engagement with the outdoors and the natural world was central to staff and volunteers’ involvement in the everyday life of the reserve, and that most of my informants had been introduced to the outdoors and the natural world in childhood. These findings also show that there was a link between their participation in the everyday activities of the reserve and their life course. To guide my inquiry into this link – which can be understood as the relationship between cultural fields, habitus and ways of relating to the woodland – the following research questions were formulated:

- What practices constitute the everyday life of the reserve?
- How is participation shaped by social actors’ habitus?
- How do the social actors of the reserve engage with the nonhuman world?
- What does participation in the everyday activities of a

nature reserve mean to the social actors involved?

In order to explore these questions I carried out an ethnographic study of Horwood, a nature reserve encompassing ancient woodland and centuries of human habitation, paying particular attention to the human and nonhuman and their ways of relating.

### **Ethnography as a Way of Investigating Woodland Life**

Central to my ethnography was joining the reserve's Thursday volunteer work party on a weekly basis for four years. I worked alongside the volunteers as they coppiced, cleared scrub and felled trees on days that in winter were cold and wet, softer and gentler in spring and so sultry in the summer that it was too humid and hot to work. As a Thursday volunteer I experienced the rewards of the company of like-minded others, being immersed in the woodland and the frustrations that were the lot of a conservation volunteer as a very small cog in the Trust's conservation mechanism.

Working with the Thursday volunteers only gave me a partial view of the everyday life of the reserve. In order to extend my view I also participated with the surveying and monitoring groups in regular activities that took place throughout the year and in monitoring bat and nightingale populations. This broadened my understanding of the reserve's activities and also extended the range of volunteers in my sample of informants. I also took part in as many of the Trust's activities as I could, both in Horwood and throughout the county in order to gain a greater understanding of its organisation, policies, practices and social networks.

Conducting my fieldwork in this way provided me with data I was seeking in regard to the way the staff and volunteers engaged with the fauna and flora of the reserve. However, the woodland's materiality remained something 'out there', not something I was fully engaging with. On reflection, this was not how I would have explained it at the time when I simply felt a vague unease that I was not getting to 'know' the woodland. By chance my gatekeeper challenged me to spend a day in the woods and camp overnight during each month of the

year. I took up the challenge and discovered camping was a very useful method of engaging with the nonhuman life of the reserve, and exploring my own relationship with what I, at the time, thought of as nature. I also camped in the woodland when participating in two-week long bat and nightingale surveys. This immersed me in the woodland and brought me into contact on a daily basis not only with the volunteers and the species being monitored but on occasion with particular, individual bats and nightingales. This was a very different way of engaging with 'nature' from my previous way of experiencing it through birdwatching, and I came to 'know' over two weeks the ways and habits of individual bats and nightingales (see Chapter Seven).

Being in the woodland became a passion and as it was good for my soul I felt the woods had become a part of me; I would like to think I am now a part of it rather than just a visitor. This however is a view from today and I failed to perceive its value to my research at the time; this realisation only emerged as I coded and analysed my data. My failure to appreciate the value to my research of my own experiences I attribute to my initial ethnographic inexperience and a preoccupation with methodology, which distracted me from my observations of what was taking place around me. Ironically as I was experiencing the magic and spirituality of the reserve's woodland, I was also attempting to introduce a questionnaire to gather quantitative data which, fortunately for my research, my informants saw as having no relationship to what they were experiencing and rejected out of hand. As I came to appreciate that my magical and spiritual experiences were also the 'stuff' of my informants' experiences, the value of an autoethnographic approach began to register with me as a way of understanding the experiences of my informants.

Undertaking ethnographic research involved immersing myself in the everyday life of the reserve as a participating observer, rather than as an observing participant (Wacquant, 2004). I experienced, alongside my informants, the everyday life of the reserve but, unlike many of my informants who only participated in a limited number of activities, I took part or at least 'tasted' the total range of activities that the staff and volunteers participated in. Having this range of experience, being reflexive about what I was experiencing, and

applying the principles of analytical, rather than evocative autoethnography, I was able to consider my informants' experiences as an insider and was able to develop a fuller understanding of their discussions about the plants and animals in which they were often passionately interested.

Not only was I able to experience the woodland alongside the staff and volunteers but I was also able to share in the 'passions of the field' (Nettleton, 2013). I could understand my informants' experiences from the perspective of an insider which gave me access to the finer nuances of their woodland experience. Being so positioned in the field provided both access to the materiality of their affective experience and the opportunity to experience and analyse the embodiment of tacit skills and understandings – as examined by Malaflouris (2008) and O'Connor (2007). This gave me insights not only into the acquisition of the tacit skills of the field but also the difficulties involved in uncovering the role played by tacit skills and knowledge in the social and material life of the reserve. Nettleton (2013) suggests that such insights are only possible for those who have experienced and 'know' a particular field.

The insights that I gained by using this autoethnographic approach can be illustrated by three particular woodland encounters that were deeply affecting; in colloquial parlance they caused a shiver to run down my spine. The first was when after an autumn night in the woods I opened my tent flap to experience the wild service trees' amber coloured leaves shining through the October mist. A second spine tingling moment occurred when I camped for several nights while participating in a survey of the reserve's nightingale population to discover if they were still breeding in the reserve. My camp was near a bird that sang 'to me' throughout the night, night after night, near to a concrete bridge at the edge of the reserve. I was affected by its song; it is as fresh today when I walk the paths in the woods near that bridge as when I experienced it six years ago. However, I was most affected when, after spending a day working in The Great Trench, in the territory of a silver-washed fritillary butterfly I witnessed it spending the day patrolling the boundaries of its territory, chasing away other butterflies and punching above its weight by seeing off much larger insects, and even small birds many times its size. At some point during the day I came to

realise, in a moment of revelation, that this creature had a life with purpose, a life that was worthy of my respect even if I could not fully appreciate its world. These encounters, amongst many others, were the immersive moments that transformed my way of being-in-the-woodland so that, rather than a visitor to another world, I became part of that world and experienced a form of being-in-the-world that Ingold (1993) conceptualises as dwelling.

These examples show how taking an autoethnographic approach to my own experience and appreciating how difficult it was to grasp my own affective and spiritual experiences has been invaluable to my analysis of others' experiences of being immersed in the reserve's woodland.

Having outlined my initial findings and the advantages of using an autoethnographic methodology, I now turn to my research questions in order to draw together the main findings of my study and reflect on my contribution to knowledge.

### **What Practices Constitute the Everyday Life of the Reserve?**

This question focused my investigation on the practices that are central to the everyday life of the reserve and, in particular, those that constitute the core activities (Stebbins, 2007) that absorb the greatest proportion of staff and volunteers' time, and lead to them becoming immersed in the woodland's muddy materiality. These core activities stem from the Trust's management policy and the way it is shaped by the environmental cultural field but, as Tim explained in Chapter Six, the culture of the reserve allows staff and volunteers to 'self-select' the practices in which they participate, and the ways in which they participate in them. Central to my informants' involvement in these practices is the pursuit of a personal interest or 'passion' for the countryside that may involve wildlife, and that can be followed in the company of like-minded others who may not share a particular interest or passion but who share, to a great extent, similar attitudes, values and dispositions.

The woodland practices that the staff and volunteers engage in fall into three broad categories: managing the reserve's woodland for conservation purposes,

of which coppicing is a central activity and mainly involves the Thursday volunteers (Chapter Six); surveying and monitoring the woodland and wildlife which is the realm of another large body of mainly volunteers (Chapter Seven); and a third category that is the least instrumental way of engaging with the reserve's woodland and wildlife, and can be glossed as pottering, ambling, mooching or simply 'going for a walk' (these terms appear throughout my analytical chapters). Each category indicates a way of pursuing an interest or passion and a particular way of becoming engaged with the reserve's woodland materiality, and each is associated with different forms of practical engagement.

The woodland management task of coppicing is a core activity and a practice that occupies the staff and volunteers on Thursdays throughout the autumn and winter months. Predominantly participated in by men it has a masculine culture where the tools of competition are the embodied skills and knowledge that are gained through physical labour. This masculine culture echoes Kheel's (2008) portrayal of North American wildlife conservation as a gendered masculine field due to the masculine culture of the early conservationists; her insights were invaluable to my understanding of the 'mild' but dominant masculine culture of Horwood and the gendering of its practical tasks. The woodland environment provides coppicers with the opportunity to satisfy instrumental needs, such as engaging in physical exercise like Phil and Tim, or acquiring and displaying the skilled use of hand tools or technology in the form of the chainsaw. My insider-ness was invaluable to my understanding of these embodied and gendered skills and their acquisition (or lack thereof), and how some social actors were able to adapt the skills that they had acquired from their professional or academic cultural fields to the practical tasks of the reserve.

For the most part the tacit skills associated with coppicing are acquired by professional middle-class men, and a few women, whose experience of such manual skills, prior to their involvement in the conservation practices of the reserve, was limited. The skills they display are different, often intellectual or managerial rather than manual, and have been acquired in a range of occupational fields. Many have skills that are transposable to this new environment and assist them in acquiring the traditional tacit skills and

knowledge that are associated with the practice of coppicing and managing the bonfire. This was very apparent around the bonfire when some of the volunteers used their managerial skills to understand the routines involved. They were able to implement what they observed thereby effectively ‘managing’ the bonfire. However, the skills and knowledge involved in lighting a fire in the wet, damp and windless conditions of a coppice coupe remained George the countryman’s ‘secret’. The tacit skills that enabled him to light a fire in the most adverse of conditions had been acquired imperceptibly from each experience of lighting a fire during a lifetime of lighting bonfires. Understanding the ways of the bonfire slowly becomes embodied as each new fire enables a successful outcome. Having the “secrets” of the skills required does not, however, mean that the person with those tacit skills can explain them to themselves or others (cf. Malaflouris, 2008; O’Connor, 2007). They are ‘beneath consciousness’ and embodied (Bourdieu, 1977).

The possession of tacit skills and knowledge generates a form of capital specific to the field, and attributes status to those who possess such capital (Nettleton, 2013). This is apparent in the way that field-specific cultural capital is valued and in the respect which the staff and volunteers extend to George. They are aware of and appreciate his embodied skills and knowledge which come from a lifetime of physical engagement in the field. He embodies the tacit skills associated with woodland conservation practices; I have conceptualised this in terms of a woodland habitus which is associated with a particular way-of-being-in the woodland referred to by George as ‘mooching’. Mooching, pottering, ambling and going for a walk, absorb many hours of unorganised, non-instrumental engagement with the woodland during which an encounter with even a single bird or butterfly may be deemed as fulfilling.

Mooching as a way-of-being-in-woodland is difficult to describe. It came to my attention when I interviewed George and asked him questions that were aimed at understanding what he most enjoyed doing and what fascinated him most in the woodland. Most of my informants had ready responses such as walking by the river in winter or looking for wildflowers, birds and butterflies. George, in contrast, appeared to prevaricate and would not, as I thought at the time, give a

definitive answer. On being pressed his reply was he would just have a mooch around somewhere. For a time I misunderstood and thought he was not wanting to answer my questions. Later I came to understand that he could not answer my questions as they had no relevance to his understanding of being in Horwood's woodland. Mooching is precisely George's way-of-being-in-woodland and involves him in being there for no other reason than simply being. He may coppice, survey and monitor birds, butterflies and orchids but these activities are only different forms of being-in-the-woodland. When mooching there are no expectations other than experiencing what the woodland has to offer and being open to its affect.

Surveying and monitoring of the reserve's flora, fauna and woodland habitat is, like coppicing, a core activity engaged in by the volunteers; the staff are involved less than they are in woodland management. The purpose of surveying and monitoring is to measure populations and habitats; it is also an activity that brings participants into contact with the plants and animals being surveyed but the activity and its purpose are usually more important to the participant than the nonhuman subject about which data is being gathered.

The core activities of coppicing, surveying and monitoring, also involve participants in the practices of walking, talking and sharing food together, practices that created a cohesive social group. As I have shown, these prosaic activities are an important element of conservation practices and are highly valued by the participants. For example, coppicers meet and chat on arrival and on the walk both to and from the work site. This is usually an intimate affair involving just one or two other coppicers. However, at break time eating and conversation becomes a group affair when everyone sits together two or three times a day. Figures 5.1 and 6.1 show the Thursday volunteers and the way they typically gather together for a tea or lunch break. Tim wrote about break times and how he felt about the conversation. I have used his words earlier in my thesis, however, I will use them again as he puts the meaning of break times succinctly:

Most of us sit around in a group – in a bit of sun if there is some – and chat. Some prefer to go off and sit alone, but usually within



hearing distance of the group. Conversation covers financial matters, international politics, current affairs etc. etc. etc. – every week we fix the world and every week it gets undone ... what must we sound like but hey, that's part of the deal I think!

Every Thursday the volunteers had the opportunity to address the issues of the world from the security of the company of like-minded others in Horwood's glades.

In my analytical chapters I portray the core practices of voluntary conservationists: coppicing, surveying and monitoring. Because of this the chapters do not describe all of the practices engaged in or mention all of the staff and volunteers that participate or contribute to the everyday life of the reserve. Despite this, participants who are not referred to directly could recognise their involvement with the reserve. This is because their involvement is similar to that of those who participated in these core activities. An investigation into other woodland management or ecological monitoring practices would, I consider, in large part replicate my findings. I found that what is central to all of these activities, even for those who have instrumental reasons for their participation, such as becoming involved for the exercise that coppicing provided or to acquire the ecological data provided by monitoring birds, bats and butterflies, is becoming immersed in the woodland.

### **How is Participation Shaped by Social Actors' Habitus?**

One of my main findings is that social actors' interactions with the reserve are shaped by their habitus. My analytical chapters all contribute to some extent to this finding, however, Chapters Six and Seven with their focus on the practical activities of woodland management and ecological surveying and monitoring are particularly relevant to understanding the way habitus shapes participation. In particular the idea that Bourdieu (1977), Desmond (2007) and Wacquant (2014a) proposed, that habitus can be conceptualised as having clear stages, and that these can be related to different cultural fields, enables an understanding of the relationship between the habitus and informants' engagement in the everyday life of the reserve.

The question of how participation is shaped by habitus focused my study on how cultural fields experienced during participants' trajectories through life shape their habitus, thereby shaping their participation in the everyday life of the reserve. The cultural fields of childhood and employment are particularly significant here, and help to explain both the way participants engaged with the nonhuman world and how they became immersed in the woodland. My findings demonstrate the embeddedness of the attitudes, values and dispositions of a person's general habitus and the less persistent nature of those of the specific habitus. Associating the general habitus with childhood and the domestic cultural field, and the specific habitus with the cultural fields of education and employment, contributes not only to explaining the staff and volunteers' preferences for participating in some activities rather than others but also the roles they preferred to take when involved in specific tasks.

Ted and Nick are examples of how participants could engage in the practices associated with coppicing in quite different ways. These differences can be explained with reference to their general habitus and the cultural fields that shaped them. Both shared similar backgrounds: they were children from middle-class families who lived in small country towns, their mothers had a passing interest in birds, and they were both trained in woodland management practices at agricultural colleges – this I discussed in Chapter Six. Nevertheless, they managed and practised coppicing in very different ways: Ted took a craft approach that valued the task for the skills involved, whereas Nick most valued the task when it was efficiently carried out, usually with a chainsaw.

The cultural fields that contributed to these differences, which I have analysed in terms of Ted and Nick's general habitus, were characterised by very different attitudes and values. While growing up, they both experienced rural cultural fields, and both valued an outdoor, rural environment. Ted, however, came to value the traditional craft skills of a rural cultural field whereas Nick valued the modern practices he had encountered through engagement with the farming community and country sports, which were part of a different cultural field. They each embodied the values of the fields they experienced in the different skills they practised, which, in turn, reflected the dispositions of their general

habitus. This is not an isolated instance but it is a common pattern amongst the staff and volunteers.

The idea that cultural fields shape habitus and that there are recognisable stages of a habitus made it possible to unpack the biographies of the staff and volunteers and identify what had shaped their habitus. It also made it possible to relate the class and urban/rural nature of these cultural fields to the way the staff and volunteers engaged with the woodland and wildlife of the reserve. We have already seen that my informants' affinity with the woodland's materiality was shaped by the cultural fields of childhood. Most of those from lower or professional middle-class backgrounds had a habitus that is at ease in the reserve's cultural field; this reflects the fact that this cultural field is shaped by the attitudes and values of middle-class volunteers and professional ecologists and environmentalists. Not all of the participants were from middle-class backgrounds, however; two informants and myself were from working-class backgrounds and, although our class backgrounds were similar, the cultural fields we experienced in early life were very different. I and one of my informants experienced an industrial working class culture whereas the other, George, experienced a rural working-class childhood. Having a general habitus that emerged from an industrial working-class cultural field meant that our attitudes and values differed substantially from those characterising the reserve's cultural field. In contrast, having a general habitus that emerged from a rural cultural field and a specific habitus that emerged from lifelong physical work in farming and woodland shapes a way of being in woodland that fulfils Bourdieu's criterion for being 'like a fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 p.127). George was the only person whose general and specific habitus did not diverge and he was perfectly at home in the cultural field of the reserve.

Linked to this is the finding that, for some, their interest in 'nature' remained the same while for others it changed, usually through professional socialisation. Some, such as Bert, Mary, Sid and Erica, followed their childhood interests and, in line with their general habitus became professionals in fields such as forestry, ecology and environmental consultancy; these fields then shaped their specific habitus. George, in contrast, remained an amateur 'naturalist' as he had been as

a child, remaining in the same cultural field throughout his life. For most this meant a divergence between their general and specific habitus with some of my informants developing what I have called, ideal typically, a ‘rational-scientific’ orientation towards the natural world while others retain a more affective connection (Chapter Seven). This, in turn, led to differences in their perception of the woodland and wildlife of the reserve, and influenced how they participated in its care. For instance, Hazel participated as a professional, scientific ecologist, Bert as a forest manager and George as a naturalist. However, although my informants’ orientations towards the reserve may be understood in terms of these ideal types, in practice they are not necessarily so distinct and, depending on circumstance, social actors may respond to the natural world in a rational-scientific way or be moved to an affective response by the circumstance of the moment. I provided an example of this ‘messiness’ in Chapter Seven with Hazel’s response to scrub clearance and her abandonment of ecological language when she refers to muntjac deer having, not a habitat, but a ‘home’.

I consider that drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, both general and specific, and cultural fields, has been fruitful as it helps to explain the way that social actors participate differently in the same activity. It also demonstrates that involvement in the everyday life of the reserve is shaped by staff and volunteers’ habitus which, in turn, is influenced by the cultural fields they experience. Thus, through examining the idea that there are recognisable stages of habitus (general and specific) and that they relate to the cultural fields that social actors experience, it was possible to identify the significant influences of a cultural field on social actors’ ways of engaging with the woodland.

### How Do the Social Actors of the Reserve Engage with the Nonhuman World?

This question focused my attention on the task of understanding the diverse ways my informants engage with the material world of the woodland. One of my most important findings is that the staff and volunteers do this through physically immersing themselves day after day, week after week and year after year. Theirs is not a casual acquaintance with something ‘out there’. On the

contrary, as they engage in conservation practices they become immersed in the woodland's materiality, and to varying degrees move from engaging with it as something 'out there' to being a part of it; in other words, this immersion affects social actors' ways of being-in-the-world. In understanding how participants engage with the nonhuman world of the reserve I follow the turn to understanding ways of being-in-the-world from a phenomenological perspective that has focused scholars on the body's unconscious relationship with the material world. I found that through their activities the staff and volunteers engage bodily with the woodland's materiality; they not only affect the woodland through the practices in which they engage but are themselves affected and transformed. An important part of this process is their embodied and sensory engagement with the woodland.

The senses are seen by some scholars as central to understanding the tacit skills of those who physically engage with the material world. In the literature there is a substantial emphasis on the acquisition of bodily skills required for particular tasks, such as pot throwing or glass blowing (Malaflouris, 2008; O'Connor, 2007), but relatively little analysis of those who are proficient in engaging with the materiality of the environment (for exceptions see Evers, 2009; Humberstone, 2011; Nettleton, 2013; Throsby, 2016). As I show in Chapter Six, mud is the materiality of which tacit embodied knowledge is crucial for proficient involvement in the cultural field of the reserve. My informants' 'real' experiencing of mud involves multiple bodily senses that both directly engage with the mud but are also mediated by the tools and equipment used and protective clothing worn.

As we have seen, participating in the everyday life of the reserve involves social actors in practices, which bring them into engagement with the woodland through the bodily senses of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. Potter (2008 p.446) argues that these senses should be understood as 'an intermeshed web of perceptory apparatus that direct the body's total attention to its situation in the world'. For those involved in core activities such as coppicing, the activity is one of muscular engagement with woodland materiality through walking, cutting, clearing and burning. However, during this muscular engagement

participants are also experiencing and being affected by the woodland's nonhuman materiality; they use their senses to see its plants and animals, listen to the wind in the trees and bird song, smell the scent of the wild garlic, bluebells and the earth itself and taste the woodland through its berries and herbs.

Scent and sound, in the form of birdsong, are central to the character of the woodland materiality as Ted (Chapter Four) reminds us when he is talking of the woodland's wild flowers: 'everything is together under the birdsong [and] [w]ith the scent it's a really heady atmosphere'. For Bert the senses of sight and hearing contribute to an affective experience that is also spiritual; he tells us in Chapter Seven: 'if there's a bit of mist about . . . then the woodland has a particular character all of its own and the birdsong penetrates and I just find that – well it's good for the soul.' These experiences suggest that the woodland is not a backdrop to social actors' core activities but acts on them and with them. Participants' bodily and sensory engagement in these core activities opens them up to being affected by the nonhuman world and is central to their engagement with the nonhuman.

Engaging with the woodland can be transformative. Some of those who initially have an instrumental motivation for engagement, underpinned by assumptions about nature and the nonhuman being 'other' and 'out there', can, through immersion in the woodland, experience the division between themselves and the world about them dissolve and find themselves being 'part of' the woodland. The human-nonhuman distinction vanishes. This can be illustrated through the practice of coppicing which takes the coppicers into the woodland for up to seven hours a week throughout the winter months. Constant engagement with the woodland's materiality has consequences and an intimate engagement with the nonhuman inhabitants occurs that, for some is, transformative (see Tim's transformation from someone who used the woodland as a backdrop to his distance running to his becoming an aficionado of birdsong – Chapter Eight). Being immersed in woodland transforms coppicers' mode of engaging with the reserve; it becomes less the 'other' (something out there) and more something they are a part of and affected by. They begin to experience the woodland

materiality to a greater or lesser degree in a similar way to George who has spent his life engaged in bodily labour on farms and in woodland, and in consequence both dwells and has a woodland habitus.

As a way of understanding the staff and volunteers' engagement with the woodland and wildlife of the reserve Ingold's concept of dwelling provided a perspective that related their way of being-in-woodland to their way of being-in-the-world. I found that a limited number of my informants could be characterised as engaging with the nonhuman world instrumentally as something 'out there' and that at the opposing end of the spectrum were those who could be conceptualised as dwelling (Ingold, 1993). However between these two extremes, and often in association with the transformative powers of being immersed in woodland, my informants' engagement with the world about them could be understood as a relation of 'becoming with' (Despret, 2004; Haraway, 2008) or fleetingly dwelling. These informants were the ones who through immersion in the woodland were transformed by it and came to move along with it rather than act on it; they experienced being part of the woodland even if this was only momentary. I discuss these different ways of engaging with the woodland in turn.

An instrumental relationship with the woodland was demonstrated by those who regarded it as providing an environment which enabled them to engage in activities which were important to them. The woodland provides a fertile environment for the staff and volunteers to pursue their interests and passions as serious leisure activities, and for some it remains a mere backdrop to their activity. Some used it as a resource to satisfy their need to be in the outdoors, take exercise, collect data on wildlife or be in the company of like-minded others; even 'caring' for the woodland was providing the reward of 'putting something back'.

Conceptualising wildlife conservation as a serious leisure pursuit (Stebbins, 2007) and as a nature challenging activity (Davidson & Stebbins, 2011), and understanding that involvement in serious leisure and nature challenging activities are motivated by fulfilment and the experience of flow, is a valuable

aid in understanding instrumental involvement with the woodland. However, I would argue in line with Nettleton (2013) and Humberstone (2011) that these concepts do not fully address, as Nettleton puts it, ‘the passions of the field’ or, in the case of my informants, the affective relationship with the world about them that they refer to as being good for the ‘soul’ or ‘magical’. The failure by many scholars of serious leisure to recognise that treating the environment or ‘nature’ solely as a backdrop is problematic in the context of my research. It is for this reason that conceptualising wildlife conservation as a serious leisure pursuit is limited because it neither explains activities where nature is an actor (or a multitude of actors) nor does it do justice to non-instrumental ways of engaging with the reserve. For the same reason it was problematic to understand my research as a study of environmentalism and wildlife conservation. An environmental approach understands nature as something out there and a resource to be used and managed which constrains how human-nonhuman relationships can be understood.

Taking part in the everyday life of the reserve has some instrumental connotations for all of the participants but most pursue their interests and passions over months, years and, on occasion, decades; they become immersed in the woodland and transformed by it. Indeed one of my key findings is that the ‘mooching’, ‘ambling’ and ‘pottering’ engaged in by some of my participants can be conceptualised as dwelling (Ingold, 1993; 2000; 2011). I have suggested that this is associated with what I term a ‘woodland habitus’ which was apparent in George’s practical engagement with the reserve.

George was the only informant whose way of being-in-the-woodland I would characterise as dwelling and, at the other extreme, were those who had an instrumental engagement with the reserve. Most were somewhere in between and their engagement can be understood as fleetingly dwelling or ‘becoming with’ (Despret, 2004; Haraway, 2008). The engagement of those who fleetingly dwell is associated with a habitus and way of being-in-the-world which has been shaped by cultural fields where the woodland is perceived as something ‘out there’; this was my own understanding when I began my fieldwork and separates the human from the nonhuman. Some informants have ways of being-



in-the-woodland that they refer to as pottering, ambling or ‘going for a walk’ which can be understood in the same way as mooching. They engage with the woodland and are affected by its materiality; I would refer the reader to my experiences of camping in the woodland (Chapter Eight) and Dot’s explanation of what being in woodland meant to her (Chapter Seven). When in the woodland in this mode, which is a temporary rather than permanent mode of engagement, the separation between themselves and the woodland materiality dissolves and they can be characterised as dwelling, but only fleetingly. ‘Becoming with’ the woodland may also be experienced, even by those participating in activities for instrumental purposes, in so far as they are affected by the woodland through becoming immersed in it. They experience themselves as part of rather than separated from the materiality of the woodland at least for a while. This is apparent in Chapter Six where I discuss the feeling at the end of the day’s coppicing when the woodland has been transformed and, in turn, has transformed how the coppicers feel, both emotionally with a sense of fulfilment and physically in their tired bodies.

I discovered in the early stages of my research that to understand and portray the ‘richness’ of the staff and volunteers’ relationship with the reserve’s woodland and wildlife that is physical, affective and on occasion spiritual was a challenging prospect. For most of my participants being immersed in the woodland was to varying degrees transformative; most responded to what the woodland afforded and engaged with the woodland’s affective and spiritual dimensions. However, for some this was only a temporary state of affairs and set them apart from those whose way of being-in-the-world predisposes them to engage affectively and spiritually with the reserve.

In answering this question about the engagement of my informants with the woodland I conceptualised it on a spectrum spanning from instrumental engagement at one end, through ‘becoming with’ and dwelling fleetingly, to dwelling at the other end. This typology is useful in analysing the different ways social actors engage with woodland, and shows that it is only George, with a woodland habitus, who can be understood as dwelling. I have also shown that bodily engagement is fundamental to how woodland materiality is experienced

and that, through the senses, the woodland is profoundly affecting. All the participants were affected by the woodland, some by the trees, some by butterflies, and some by simply being in the reserve and experiencing its ‘magic’.

### **What Does Participation in the Everyday Activities of a Nature Reserve Mean to the Social Actors Involved?**

The question of meaning focused my study on two areas: the first associated with instrumental involvement in everyday activities, and the second stemming from experiences that have for the participant affective or spiritual meaning. The latter involves experiences that were often found to be beyond words other than ‘magical’ or ‘good for the soul’ which is evident in the way participants talk about their encounters with the nonhuman in the form of bluebells, trees or other animals. This is something that is not immediately apparent from observing the practical activities that they engage in but emerged from interviews and informal conversations round the bonfire. These experiences were at the heart of being immersed in the materiality of the woodland but were also the most challenging to address. However, through my autoethnographic fieldwork, I became immersed in the woodland and experienced its magic and I was able to use these experiences to inform my analysis.

One of my informants explained that entering the reserve’s woodland was like entering another world, and most of my informants were at least to some extent moving between worlds if not entirely escaping to another one. In the analytical chapters of my thesis, I established that the everyday life of the reserve is a tangled ‘mess’ of relationships involving human and nonhuman interaction. To unpick this complex mess of relationships I have relied on the explanatory powers of habitus, dwelling and ‘becoming with’, however, my informants rarely addressed the question of what involvement with the reserve, or more widely, what the woodland and its wildlife ‘means’ to them. They ‘know’ and demonstrate by their actions that being in the outdoors, giving something back, and being able to follow their interests, matters to them. This is evident in the way they participate in the everyday life of the reserve, and as my data shows can be associated with their habitus and the cultural fields they have

experienced. Nevertheless, the meaning that involvement in the everyday life of the reserve has for staff and volunteers varies from one individual to another, and for a particular individual it may change over time.

Meaning for some is provided by the value the reserve has in the instrumental advantage it provides to their career, the younger bat monitors provide an example of this. Ron also instrumentally engages with the woodland; he finds meaning in the fastidious way that he records his observations and in the production of an accurate record of bird and butterfly numbers. Accurate data and knowledge of population and status are for him the fundamental foundation of wildlife conservation. He considers that without such knowledge there is no basis on which conservation can be practised. Here for him is where meaning lies, not in the activity itself, simply watching and being among butterflies and birds, but in the consequences of the watching which is accurate data.

Even for the most instrumental of participants, however, being immersed in the woodland can hold affective, magical and spiritual meaning. For scholars of serious leisure this would be a moment of flow when those involved find themselves so distracted they are in another place. However, as Humberstone (2011) recognises, such concepts have only a limited capacity for explaining the magic that is experienced at such moments when the distinction between the human and the nonhuman dissolves and, in Ingold's terms, what is experienced is becoming part of the world.

I began this thesis with a quote from Leopold in which he proposes that some people cannot live without wild things. When I began my research I took this to mean wild things in wild places but having completed it I would argue that some people, in order to live fulfilling lives, need to experience more than the built environment; they need to be, at least for some of their time, in the outdoors experiencing the sun, wind and rain in the company of both the living and non-living inhabitants of the nonhuman world. The reserve's woodland gives my informants free access to a world dominated by the nonhuman, and their engagement in conservation activities provides a route by which they can become part of the woodland's life and it can become part of theirs.

Becoming immersed in the woodland and experiencing the woodland magic of having a dormouse or bat in your hand, being surrounded by bluebells, unexpectedly encountering a deer or listening all night to one of the last nightingales to sing in the woodland were the experiences that, for many, gave meaning to their involvement in the reserve's conservation activities. I shared the experience of magic when I encountered the wild service trees one early autumn morning after a night camping in the woods. For me this was a major step on my path of moving from treating the nonhuman world instrumentally to learning to mooch and dwell and understand the woodland and its nonhuman inhabitants not as something 'out there' but something of which I was a part. The experiences that my informants refer to as magical always involve a particular conjunction of material circumstances. They experience something that affects them and to which they affectively respond and this is what encapsulates meaning for them.

There were some who did not talk in terms of magic or spirituality, they were the few from industrial and rural working-class backgrounds. My own experience may offer an explanation. I am from a working-class background but am now able to talk of 'magical' experiences; earlier in my life I would have been disposed to understand things rationally rather than in terms of 'magic' which belonged to the realm of childhood stories. Anything pertaining to affect and the inexplicable I closed myself off from. I would not link this directly to the general or specific habitus, although it is associated with both the rational-scientific mode of thinking referred to earlier and with certain forms of masculinity. I suggest that my dawning understanding of the importance of affect emerged from an increasing openness to the nonhuman and its ability to affect us in ways that are beyond words. This openness is itself an outcome of immersion in the woodland and is part of the existential capital of those who participate in the field (Nettleton, 2013).

In answering this research question I have found it helpful to think of those who find meaning in an instrumental way at one end of a spectrum and at the other end those who mooch, amble and potter and for whom what matters and has the

most meaning is simply being in the woodland. In between are those who become with and dwell fleetingly and who talk of meaning in terms of magic and spirituality. This provides a framework for explaining how immersion in woodland can transform social actors' ways of being-in-the-world from one in which they see the woodland as something 'out there' to something they feel part of and are affected by in ways that often are beyond words.

### Contribution to Knowledge

As discussed earlier, relatively little has been written sociologically about nature reserves, their human and nonhuman inhabitants and the way human lives become entangled with the lives of a particular woodland's plants, animals and mud that together constitute its materiality. By conducting an ethnography of the everyday encounters between human and nonhuman woodland actors I have crafted an original ethnographic account, and I have shown how productive an autoethnographic method can be through its generation of knowledge by means of reflection on the researcher's own subjective experiences. At the outset of my research my aim was to conduct an ethnographic rather than an autoethnographic study. As I conducted my review of the ethnographic literature I was aware of criticisms directed at what is known as the postmodern creative autoethnography approach by Anderson (2000) and Denzin (2006), both of whom are critical of placing the ethnographer at the centre of the ethnographic stage (for example see Ellis, 2004). However, as my research evolved it became increasingly apparent that social actors' magical and spiritual woodland experiences were key to understanding their relationship with the nonhuman dimensions of the reserve's woodland world. I also became aware that Nettleton (2013) had concerns regarding the difficulties of accessing both the experiences of social actors who have an intense physical engagement with an activity and the 'passions' within the field. These concerns paralleled my own as I endeavoured to analyse the 'magical' experiences of my informants. It became apparent that the insights I could gain from reflecting analytically on my own experiences of magic could provide a perspective from which to view and understand the magical experiences of others. This approach contributes a depth to my ethnography by allowing the researcher to engage with affective experiences in a way that aids

an understanding of the ‘passions’ of the field while avoiding the pitfall of becoming the focus of the ethnographic story. In this way my study demonstrates the methodological advantages of using autoethnographic methods.

Personal experience as a tool of analysis has been used extensively to capture the experience of being immersed in a field where bodily engagement in a sport or leisure activity is central (Edensor, 2000; Wacquant, 2004; Waitt, 2008; Merchant, 2011; Straughan, 2012; Throsby, 2016). My research shows how such an approach can also be used to explore the passions of the field of wildlife conservation and in particular the passions that arise from human engagement with the nonhuman. My autoethnographic methodology has allowed me to immerse myself in the research setting without placing myself centre stage in the ethnographic research process, as some postmodern ethnographers have done (Ellis, 2004). I have used my own experience of being immersed in woodland as data, and by critically analysing my own experiences as I would other data I have been able to develop an understanding of others’ woodland experiences, particularly those which are often ‘beyond words’ and captured by concepts such as existential capital (Nettleton, 2013).

As well as contributing an original ethnographic account of human-nonhuman entanglements in a nature reserve, I have also brought together concepts from different theoretical traditions in a novel way and used them to analyse my data. In particular, I have developed an analytical framework which brings together the concepts of habitus and dwelling. In so doing I have developed these concepts and shown the value of using them together to understand both the forms taken by human engagement with the nonhuman and how these forms are shaped by habitus.

To gain an understanding of how my informants’ participation in the everyday activities of the reserve was shaped by their habitus I used the concepts of general and specific habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; Desmond, 2007; Wacquant, 2014a) to refer to stages of the development of habitus. In this way I was able to explore the relationship between general and specific habitus, the cultural fields

that generated them, and the way in which habitus shapes involvement in conservation activities. However, I found that rather than thinking of stages of the habitus as a linear progression it was more helpful to understand them as particular associations of values, attitudes and dispositions that emerge, not at specific stages in life, but rather in relation to the cultural fields within which social actors are located. For example, amongst my informants two were newly retired: one from a career in ecology and the other from a career in forestry; both had acquired the specific habitus of these cultural fields. On retirement, the values, attitudes and dispositions of their general habitus became more influential than those of their specific habitus in the way they participated in the everyday life of the reserve. This suggests that the values, attitudes and dispositions of the general habitus may be overlaid by those of the specific habitus when the social actor is actively engaged in a cultural field of employment, but that those of the general habitus re-emerge when the social actor exits that particular cultural field for another, in this case that of conservation in the reserve.

In relation to dwelling, I have used it not only to refer to a permanent way of being-in-the-world, as does Ingold (1993), but also to explain that in some circumstances social actors may dwell fleetingly. This happens when their instrumental engagement with the world is transformed through immersion in the woodland and, if only momentarily, they dwell; in so doing they experience themselves as part of the woodland rather than acting upon it.

Bringing together the concepts of habitus and dwelling enabled me to posit a link between the cultural fields that social actors experience, the general and specific habitus that emerge from these cultural fields, and how these shape whether or not the relationship of human actors with the woodland can be understood as dwelling.

Habitus and dwelling are important for my research, not only in abstracted terms of values, attitudes and dispositions, on the one hand, and ways of being-in-the-world, on the other, but in terms of understanding the everyday woodland lives of my informants. In these lives, the way habitus shapes and is shaped by

cultural fields and how the values, attitudes and disposition of their habitus shape social actors' ways of being-in-the-world can be traced. This explains how some social actors perceive nature and the nonhuman world as something 'out there' to be used instrumentally while for others the natural world is something they are a part of.

I have also contributed to understanding human engagement with the nonhuman by problematizing the term 'nature', and by seeking not only to understand what nature means to my informants but also how the term nature can hide what the different elements of woodland materiality mean to them. In this context, conceptualising wildlife conservation as a serious leisure activity appeared to offer access to a body of research which was relevant in terms of a conceptual approach and an empirical investigation (Davidson & Stebbins, 2011; Edensor, 2000; Stebbins, 2007). In particular, Davidson and Stebbins' (2011) concept of nature challenging core activities appeared to be relevant. As I have already indicated, it soon became apparent that the serious leisure approach does not adequately problematise 'nature' and this led me to question the use of the term 'nature' to describe the environment in which nature challenging core activities take place. In particular, and in common with others (see for example Evers, 2009), I take issue with the approach that treats the material world as a backdrop, something 'out there' to be used, rather than as an agent that actively contributes to the activity. As a result I have analysed the contribution that the nonhuman world makes to the activities, experiences and ways of being-in-the-world of wildlife conservationists.

The serious leisure literature has also been criticised for its neglect of gender (see Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Throsby, 2016). My findings reveal the gendered nature of wildlife conservation activities and the masculinised culture in which they take place thereby supporting researchers who argue that serious leisure is gendered.

Finally, and despite what I now see as the limitations of my research, it has demonstrated the centrality of practice to social actors' ways of being-in-the-world and has revealed the importance of developing methods that enable the



researcher to understand the affective, spiritual dimensions of experience and the tacit skills and knowledge that are such a crucial part of the practices of 'mooching', 'ambling' and 'pottering'. These can be understood as dwelling, and are ways of being-in-the world adopted by social actors who engage with the world not as something out there but as a world that they are part and parcel of.

### Reflecting on my Study

If I had the opportunity to put to rights all of that which, I now realise in my research, is incomplete or where I have failed to take advantage of the opportunities that were available to me, I would still conduct an ethnographic study; particularly as my investigation has rewarded me, not only with intellectual development but also with a greater understanding of my relationship with woodland and wildlife than I would have considered possible when I began this journey. The most radical change I would make would be to reject caution and, from the beginning, immerse myself in the cultural field under investigation to gain access to the affective and spiritual passions of the field. I would take an analytical autoethnographic approach in order to safeguard the verisimilitude of the research findings that emerge from ethnographic analysis.

My theoretical approach, using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural fields, I consider has been fruitful, and has demonstrated that involvement in the everyday life of the reserve is not separate from, but is a part of the life-course of the staff and volunteers of Horwood Nature Reserve. I also consider that Ingold's concept of dwelling has been of considerable value, and I would in future conduct my research with a greater regard to his promotion of the value of using a non-dualist ontology as a basis for understanding the relationship between human social actors and the nonhuman.

As I reflect on the understanding I have developed from my study of Horwood Nature Reserve and how I would approach such a project in the future, I realise that I would use a similar conceptual approach but analyse a broader range of material settings and the social actors who are immersed in them. This would

enable me to explore how different nonhuman materialities are engaged with by social actors and how they both transform and are transformed by them.

## Epilogue

Since the end of my fieldwork the routines of the everyday life of the reserve have continued under the supervision of Nick. On the occasions when I now volunteer on Thursdays very little has changed and the experience is very familiar. Most of those who were part of my study still volunteer and contact is still maintained with those who do not via social media, or when they attend the volunteers' Christmas party and summer barbeque. However, I have two sad events to relate; after a short illness Dot died earlier this week (February 2018). I last spoke to her six months ago to chat about a very large, veteran elm tree that had surprisingly survived the Dutch elm disease that had ravaged elms in the county in the 1970s. At the time she sounded to be in good heart. Valley Wood has lost a true friend, nevertheless her love of it will remain for all to see as Kate is planning to digitise, archive and make available Dot's notebooks, surveying and monitoring records and photographs. The second, is that Nick was summarily dismissed from his post two weeks ago in a way that has distressed the volunteers. They have all decided that until he has been reinstated or his dismissal justified they will no longer volunteer and, if need be, will sever all formal connections with the Trust if not with the other volunteers and the woodland. As a body they are prepared to sacrifice the fulfilment that volunteering with the Thursday group provides and the contact with the Horwood woodland it brings because they feel that the well-being of Nick and Horwood are inseparable.

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